

INGRAM

By
R. H. GRETTON

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FOREWORD

THIS book is an exercise in the Disraelian manner. Behind this description I hope to find protection. "Coningsby" and "Sybil" do not offer much development of character or culmination of incident. They offer rather an exercise of curiosity, political and social; and the succession of incidents is designed for little more than the display of this quality at work. The fruitfulness of Disraeli's novels nowadays is chiefly in their stimulation of a similar curiosity in the reader. They do not solve problems. The theory of the "Venetian oligarchy" was not the master-key to the political situation in the eighteenth century; "Young England" did not come to the triumph prepared for it in "Coningsby"; the "Two Nations" of the rich and the poor have not found the way of sympathy imagined for them in "Sybil." Disraeli's rapid political summaries were not severe history, nor were his social surveys statistical abstracts. They form a model for the

exercise of curiosity upon a situation fully as pregnant as that of eighty years ago. I have followed my model's loose succession of scenes and incidents as faithfully as I am able to in an age more shy than Disraeli's of thickly laid colour.

I

IT was the first night of the General Election, and the big smoking-room of the Club was crowded. For the time the most habit-ridden old member had ceased to growl at the disturbance of the normal arrangement of the place, the swamping of his own particular corner in a sea of chairs, all facing towards the green-baize screen at one end. Through the haze of smoke, in which the long rows of hanging lights grew dimmer, the names and figures going up from time to time on the screen could hardly be made out. They went up fitfully, sometimes in quick batches of four and five, sometimes singly at long intervals, brought from the cheers and uproar of a packed crowd before some town hall a hundred miles away to the cheers or silence of that packed room. Cheers or silence, for the Club was avowedly political—that is to say, party leaders could always rely upon it for the kind of shout they might happen at any time to want. A lunch

in honour of a new Minister, of the Party Whips, or of some private group in the House, was always sufficient to make the Club feel itself in the van of revolution, or petty-officering the army of progress, according as the leaders wanted either to rush the party over some too complicated Bill or to make it swallow one a trifle too mild.

To-night it was at its most porridgy positiveness. The army of progress, whose members for some years had been apt to speak of themselves in their more expansive and pathetic moments as toiling over the desert, had almost startlingly appeared in most vigorous force at the leaders' backs. The leaders, not altogether without the aspect of having been jolted hurriedly forward by the over-sudden arrival of a host behind them, had constructed a Cabinet which they hoped would be called thoroughly democratic. That, of course, was what the Club was calling it. It was mainly composed of men whom they had often seen smoking in these very chairs. Most of the victors whose names were going up on the green-baize board had also smoked here; it was likely enough that every other one of them might after the next election have little

to do but smoke here again. But this likelihood was as yet mercifully hidden from the not inconsiderable number of men in the room who felt rather acutely their own fitness for drawing minor official salaries.

The roar of talk hushed down as a figure walked out before the green-baize board to hoist more results. Up they went, and a burly man, who happened to be a real politician, and for a dozen years had been showing the Trades Unions subtle holes in Acts of Parliament, laughed consumedly, and said :

“ Well, if he’s in, they’re all in ! ” Orthodox members decided after a moment that this was a joke ; one or two young men laughed, in ignorance of subtleties ; a few others uncomfortably recalled having been taken in completely by the muddled sentimentalism of this new victor. Then talk shot up again suddenly.

“ Oh, they’re all in, Paton ; but you’re an ass, none the less. No fool can get in for a Lancashire town.”

“ Who said he was a fool ? But what use do you think a Lancashire town has for righteous indignation about district commissioners in India ? ”

“Not much, I daresay. But you people have never taken in that the Manchester school, behind its ideas, had some pleasure in reminding the squires that the reins were not all in their hands. And that is what Hoyland’s worrying of the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary for India keeps up.”

“Ah, you’re all wrong. He’s in on the party programme, and that’s going to run like fire.”

“By George, look at that! Graham in for Capelbury by four figures! There’s your real augury, Paton—a cathedral city captured.”

As the cheering subsided, some informed person was to be heard explaining that Capelbury really turned nowadays on an industrial vote; the Close was a mere island in a sea of manufactories. But the point was lost, for a new result had gone up, and it revealed that a sensational Liberal capture of a far less fortunate year had been a freak. There was a silence, in which a rather savage roar from outside came through discomposingly.

A tallish young man, with an ingratiating head, that had hatched from time to time depressed estimates of the life of industrialism, was passing out of the door, when the palpably

positive quality of the sudden silence in the room arrested him. He looked back at the screen, but unable to see through the haze asked: "What's gone up?"

"Oh, the Pinkhill result," a man answered. "Jameston is out."

The young man smiled beatifically, and with profound content went down the staircase. He had a constitutional dislike of sensational victors, and Jameston had previously triumphed just at a moment to encourage his party in what the young man had thought a singularly foolish move for an Opposition to make. He believed that sensational victors always were guilty of inopportune encouragements.

He wanted to go into the streets and see how the people were taking things, because he really knew something of the people, even though in his theories about them he figured so far as little more than a man who has walked firmly into water, but has not discovered how to keep his head above it. Ingram's head had emitted only gasps as yet, but they were the contained gasps of a strong man, and not the paroxysms that the superficial on the other side took them to be. The superficial on his own side considered them articulate, and he

therefore knew himself to be marked for an under-secretaryship. His time at Oxford had coincided with a revival from the first check to the democratic pose. Liberal dons were going on to Boards of Guardians, and the leading lights of the Union were not Franchisereformers but Poor Law statisticians. Ingram, finding the debates when he first came up dominated on the Liberal side by a remnant of the old pose, had so rapidly made himself a name in the newer school that he had come down with a reputation for seriousness, which had caused his books, launched in his own mind as modest presentations of fact—too modest to attempt constructiveness—to be regarded as gloomy decisions to the effect that the world of labour was beyond remedy.

To-night it was not the world of labour that most affronted him in the streets. London was out, London in its most discouraging aspect of casual appetite. Ingram often reflected that the evil of being a world-city was hardly enough recognised in London. It was not only her size, though that blocked the way to the growth of such self-respect as one found in the great provincial cities, the self-respect that would withhold citizens from

presenting themselves to the world as gaping spectators of a perpetual show. The frequency of the show was rotting London. It was becoming a place where no one, not even the inhabitants, lived. Brakes full of Americans turning grey-veiled heads or egregiously efficient eye-glasses this way and that at the bidding of an ill-educated man with a megaphone ; or, at the other end of the scale, some over-uniformed monarch in a high-swung carriage rolling down a bare, yellow-sanded roadway, lifting a saluting hand to a queerly concentrated face—these things, and the daily flood of sensational newspapers, were making London a place where several millions worked, fed, grumbled, chaffed and slept, but where no one lived except such young clerks as hung together on a basis of cricket and football. And now newspaper ingenuity was turning even a General Election into a Punch and Judy show. Ingram glanced at the crowd standing under the end of the Club terrace, spreading like a pool over road and pavements, with faces upturned to the screen on which a magic-lantern projected the results in writing thinned down by the magnification to a horrible spidery grey. He glanced up the

street, to where a peculiar density on the roadway and a peculiar beaminess of light indicated another screen and another crowd. As the results were shown, hoarse sounds beat to and fro from one crowd to the other, flapping like churned water against the tall buildings in the street. Ingram glanced at these crowds; he was off to the heart of the show.

In the Strand the space of empty ground cleared from the stained streets of the old, dirty, thieving, lecherous London, that used to hide itself in mass rather than in extension, had been seized upon by newspapers as the ideal spot for this latest spectacle. Upon Ingram, coming to the spot by a side street from the river, the space burst in the excited night like a veritable fair ground. From the surrounding buildings the white beams of lanterns crossed and shook in mid-air, hostile as swords. A bar near by glowed comfortably; from a roof, whereon a newspaper in thirst for originality signified a result by red or blue searchlight rays, which could be shot out before any of the other organisations had time to write the names and figures, coloured lights poured in a hot-looking column on the crowds, which swayed and sniggered self-consciously

beneath them. From another roof enlightenment went to the pampered inhabitants of the heights of the Crystal Palace or Hampstead by means of rockets, red and blue. From another, for greater certainty in case the rapid rocket was missed, a red or blue searchlight beam stood straight on end, remaining turned to white when no result was in, so that the far-off spectators could keep their eyes rightly directed. Down by the screens, when Ingram's eyes fell to them again, blue and red Bengal fires flared, illuminating their own rolling smoke, to re-emphasise the colour of each result.

The whole place appeared to smoulder in uneasy flickers, leap into flame, and smoulder again. Roar and crackle came from the crowds, cheering, booing, laughing—the disturbing, unfriendly laughs of a crowd—spurting into shouts. Now and then motor buses, hooting hysterically, rolled up to the edge, and then checked and ploughed slowly, exactly as though they had run suddenly into axle-deep water. Policemen, keeping the crowd's fringes eternally and fussily tidy, concealed their political opinions from jesting inquirers. Ingram hardly needed to run his eye along

this crowd ; any Londoner would know what it was made of. The vast race of clerks, old and young ; the equally vast, but somewhat more mysterious, race of warehousemen ; shop-assistants of every grade—perhaps only to be distinguished from the clerks when the grade was fairly obviously that of bacon and butter, or greengrocery ; few artisans ; but a numerous sprinkling of loosely constructed lads of whom the best hope was that they might be artisans some day ; and as a last element a number of people of whom the only definite “placing” possible was that they were Jews.

What in heaven’s name, Ingram asked himself, were they all getting out of the show ? Confusion, plainly, as to the details, though that was a minor matter which the morning papers would correct. Each human company behind the galanty show having its separate source of information, you would see at one and the same time a red rocket, two blue flares, a Liberal result and a Tory result on the screens, a searchlight turning from one to the other, and a wholly uninformed and uninforming white beam. Disputes waxed as to “how many that makes,” and for the settlement of them as many evening papers were bought from

newsboys butting vociferously into the crowd as if the newspaper organisations were supplying nothing else. A fine Liberal victory went up ; a quick relieved cheer was swamped in a heavier, contemptuous, spiteful roar of booing. Ingram smiled with a half-shrug, and was to be reminded a moment later how impossible it was to be superficial enough for a populace which could always go one better than your easiest. Out on to the screens came the astonishing news of the blank defeat of the 'Tory leader by a completely unknown man in a constituency he had held for years. Ingram waited for a roar of fury. He heard the mocking laughter of a city which will never admit you have caught it unawares, the laugh of a spoiled child breaking a toy. A man's voice, pat and vulgar, yelled a scrap of current street song : " He's a thing of the past, old dear."

Ingram turned, and left a monster chuckling over the tastiest tit-bit of its night's repast.

II

INDEED the election of that year was so remarkable that it was doubtful what anyone could argue from its results. Thoughtful men were almost reduced, like the men under Ingram's eye in the crowd, to asking merely "how many that makes." The Liberal majority so piled itself up that the bald adding of more units became exciting; and there were even some who declared that this became, after the first week, the sole guiding principle of the electorate. According to this theory, voters grew stupefied, and had no other purpose than an addition to the sum. A slight modification of the theory gave as explanation the perverted sporting spirit that the congested modern towns were producing. The Liberals were in for a big majority, and the way to get a sensation out of it was to make it monstrous. This sort of theory, while it explained well enough the slightly hilarious spirit which the results produced, may be allowed to have had some deeper reality; for if elections are carried by the wavering voter

more than by the convinced or convincing men on either side, then such external ideas were exactly the thing to carry the wavering voter, for they gave him a handy justification to produce, a possession more valuable to the normal man than he himself or his leaders have ever quite recognised. One side in English politics has half-unconsciously been meeting the need. The Empire, the Navy, the Sword in India, the Squire in England, Protective Tariffs—these are all feathers, slouched hats and crimson sashes to wear, and nobody presses for your reasons for wearing them. Get yourself a manageable horse to ride by occasional Parish Councils Acts, Small Holdings Acts, and the like, and there you are, a beautiful cavalier with no call but to be dashing and superlative. And at election times to the man of no regular army a feather is even more serviceable. It is the man who does not carry a cockade who is challenged, and has to set about explaining why he does not. A very considerable part of the large circulation of cheap Tory newspapers is probably due to their usefulness as cover for men who are Liberals, but cannot always explain themselves and stand up to the other side. It may be mean to stick a

feather in your hat when you think feathers silly, but after all it is only your Ironsides who can carry all day long buff jerkin and steel helmet.

It had chanced for once that in this election the Liberal was not badly off for feathers. The Protectionist policy, floating vaguely from Colonial reciprocity to the protection of industry and then to the fighting of foreign tariffs, and resting long at no point, was open all along its uneasy career to one flashing thrust, "The Food of the People." The South African war, which had served the Tories in 1900, was equally vulnerable; for the Tories had stayed in office long enough to let the music die down; and "Chinese in the Mines of the Transvaal" was an election cry in itself. Not only had the Tories no cries to set against these; they further made the mistake of trying to argue. For they had begun to make muddled appeals to the people, which meant that they were for the first time suffering from the poison that the notion of "Tory democracy" had introduced into their system. The idea had been given to them by a cynic, and they took it seriously when the cynic was no longer there to keep them from doing anything with it except use it

on platforms. It might never have done much harm, if the Liberal Unionist secession of 1885 had not involved an abrasion in the Tory party's skin, by which the poison fairly entered. But it must even before that have affected the party's health, since the old Tories could more easily have absorbed Gladstone himself than Chamberlain and his associates. Only some ill-regulated notion of setting up a vague connection with a democratic age could have disguised the danger of that absorption. Its effect was not seen at first. Salisbury and Devonshire must have been well aware of the peril; they had known Disraeli, and for some years they could work together, Salisbury for the old and Devonshire for the new, on a basis of coalition, not conjunction. But with the close of Salisbury's aristocratic, slightly contemptuous rule the presence of Chamberlain began to operate in a scheme traceable from the beginning of his Tory career.

Tory democracy, there can be no doubt, had appealed to him as a real possibility. He gave it a turn which was quite masterly. Finding in 1885 that the main problem and policy of the Liberals—the Government of Ireland and

the Home Rule Bill—were not going to give him much scope, he broke away from his party. But mere opposition to Home Rule was necessarily rather a negative standpoint. It could only be given vitality when the protest against the disruption swelled into an exaltation of possession, when the outcry against a self-governing Ireland turned into a glorification of the unity and magnificence of the British Empire. Chamberlain saw well what a weapon this might be. Here, again, was the hand of Disraeli, who had destroyed once for all the historic Tory attitude of indifference to Colonial possessions. Now there had been for so long no acute Colonial Question that the party could, without any too palpable turning of its coat, drop into oblivion its old attitude, its readiness to object to Imperialist expenditure, to resent opinions or claims from the Colonies. Chamberlain seized his chance. Salisbury was concerning himself about foreign affairs in the old gentlemanly tradition, and the Colonies were ready for a friend. Consequently it was perfectly in the order of Chamberlain's scheme that he should have taken the Colonial office for his first big post in a Tory Cabinet. Events, it may be remarked in passing, developed so

swiftly under his mind that we have already forgotten the surprise felt at the time, when a man of such determined ambition, and a man so marked, took an office not till then first-rate.

This assertion of the existence of the Colonies could only be a part of the general intrusion of the democratic attitude into Tory politics. Upper-class interest in them was confined to selecting governorships in places to which one had not sent extravagant sons, or sporting but otherwise unqualified younger brothers. For Chamberlain there was no other way to supremacy in the party but by extending the Tory democracy idea. True, the man who had given him his leverage had also come in from the outside; yet no one but a Jew could be at once racial and cosmopolitan enough, determined and detached enough, to beat aristocrats on their own ground. One might go deeper and say that only a Jew's sense of an ordered world, a world under a Lord our governor, could have matched, from the outside, an English aristocrat's vision of discipline in the state. Chamberlain's conception was cruder, but he made it so serviceable that in 1903 it seemed almost certain that

the Protectionist agitation, to which Colonial reciprocity was perpetually reattached by him, even in later days when others found it too unwieldy a weapon, would float him to the Premiership, the first Imperialistic Premiership.

But being of the people he never gauged the confusion into which this precipitate onrush of a falsely based alliance had plunged the Conservative party. The Protectionist movement, which might have gone forward with success, heaven knows, under a system which could frame such bland class legislation as the Agricultural Rates Act, took the Tory Democracy poison. The idea was distributed by promises of more employment; its spread was checked by the necessary substitution of the word "different" for the word "more." A tariff that would revive leather tanning would kill cheap boot-making; it would revive sugar-refining and kill mineral water and jam manufacture. The idea was preached on the basis of union between the workers of this country and those of our Colonies; and it was met by an intimation from the Colonies that they "would see Chamberlain boiled" before they would open the door to any weakening of their own

industries ; and from this country by the exposure of the impracticability of any reciprocal tariff which would not touch the poorest pockets in England. Similarly the South African war, kept cleverly enough at first to the old line, a thoroughly aristocratic one, that we were being intolerably insulted and made light of by the Boers, had been later represented as undertaken for the sake of the worker—the worker there primarily, and secondarily the possible emigrant from here. The worker there found the hideous disorganisation of war keeping him for years out of work, even after the war was over ; the worker here was given—and it proved sufficient—the number of Chinese brought into the Rand.

It was not without significance that a notable young Tory, who had in all honesty imbibed the democratic idea, discovered about this time that the ideals were conflicting, and joined the Liberals. The muddle ruined the Tories at the election. Aristocrats found themselves scattering large promises they did not feel happy in making, and altogether approaching the electorate in an undignified way. Their electioneering was a prolonged squabble. The country had sight of Tory candidates in a campaign

actually asking Chamberlain to dictate what line of reply they were to adopt when this or that difficulty arose at their meetings. Men who had labelled all who criticised the management of the South African war as traitors now became sticklers for the proprieties of speech. The Tories could hardly recognise one another during the fray, or know themselves after it. Cabinet Ministers fell one after another; and, when Parliament met, a batch of despondent men, almost without a Front Bench, had to face an enormous, jubilant Liberal majority.

III

INGRAM was safely over his election, the under-secretaryship was an accomplished fact, and he was giving a little dinner. He gave it in the grill-room of a delectable place, for he always held it an essential part of the elegance of a dinner to spend those happy five minutes with the waiter at one's elbow, whose writing of the orders on his tablets brought up no visions of kitchens and meat, but always, rather, a picture of laborious French gardens, where grew miraculous lettuces; of poplar-lined fields in Normandy, where cows give miraculous butter; and of Burgundian vineyards. The slight flourishes of the waiter's pencil seemed discreet gestures—what here was not discreet?—to waft these elegances forthwith to a table so wise and so appreciative. Moreover, besides the added elegance in one's savour of the occasion, Ingram had always held that delicate ordering was no more than a propriety of conduct in such a place.

His guests knew well, even to the point of

knowing that he knew it also, Ingram's mild affectation in the ordering of a dinner. You would never have observed in his ordering, and he would never have thought that you would, any very singular philosophy of dining, or any very audacious disturbance of a known order. Indeed, to put the whole thing at its level, it must be confessed that he gave a dinner here in this way about four times a year; but, when he did, he enjoyed the whole play of it. He found the place full of subtleties, charming for those who knew how to use them. Sit down and be ostentatious in your familiarity, speak to the waiters by name (always excepting Gustave, who is so great that he permits it), speak, as some terrible people even do, of what is on the carte "to-night," with the implied reflection of all the other nights you have dined there, and the place is either coldly efficient to you, or smiles.

Two of Ingram's guests were young barristers, who had helped him in his election, Cliffe, the son of the judge, already rather dry and positive, with a perversely featureless positiveness, and Marbrook, a great friend of Ingram's Oxford days, who took a prospective candidature so seriously that, unless Government

ceased for six months to issue Blue-books, he would never have time to make speeches on those he insatiably read. The third was a fellow-member of Parliament, James Peters, who always astounded Ingram by an ardency of belief in the House of Commons, such as no one but the Speaker ought to avow, and not even he, except from the chair. The fourth, also a fellow-member, was devoted to Ingram, who never dreamed for a moment of the depth of the attachment. Sumner followed every turn of Ingram's mind, and being a rich man, and lacking the reputation which Ingram had acquired by his writings, escaped the imputation of seriousness so successfully that Ingram's views in his mouth ceased to be called gloomy.

He was, in fact, Ingram's chief hope for this dinner, which, if it got too deeply fixed in the subject of the election, must be dull. Sumner, he knew, could be relied on to pick up any lighter tone, and he knew too that Marbrook could play with ideas that beyond a dinner-table need render no account of themselves. Marbrook had just put in a challenging way the question that most people were putting: "What, *what* has so suddenly come to the

Liberals? What is the vote that is making all the difference?"

Peters seemed likely to go off into some sententiousness about the army in the desert, so Ingram shot in front of him.

"Well," he said, "suppose what we are seeing now is the first real use of the 1885 franchise. It may surely take a new class fifteen years to make up its mind to vote. Besides, you might add that now we are far enough from the beginnings of compulsory education to be getting the first-fruits of that kind of voter."

He hoped devoutly that no one would ask him what kind of voter. Marbrook answered:

"Too airy, old man. I don't see why you should assume that neither the 1885 voter nor the 1870 school child voted in the Khaki election."

"They may have voted," Ingram said, "but isn't it our point that for the first time they have thought now as well as voted? The idea seems the least we Liberals can offer them by way of returning their compliments."

"But if they think," said Cliffe, "don't they return Labour members?"

Peters at this got in with his heaviest Commons form: "That kind of view, Cliffe,

if it exists, will be the ruin of the Labour party, which can only succeed in this country if it recognises its unanimity with Liberalism."

"I like your theory," Ingram laughed. "It's so jolly to think that unanimity can exist unrecognised."

"When I say 'recognises,'" Peters began again, but the necessity of finishing his remarks into the dish of cutlets the waiter was presenting relieved the rest of the company. Sumner was watching a very handsome girl in a dress of delicate brown silk who came in, hatless, by herself, sat down, and ordered dinner. Cliffe caught his eye, followed it, and diverted it to another table, where four women, rather more definitely American, had settled down with some laughter to open their dinner with strange cocktails that had a green fruit in them. "Yes," he commented, "I suppose that girl does represent a fairly audacious point of civilised manners. But don't you think the other table goes further?"

"No," said Sumner, "I don't. The number seems to save it."

"I believe that's not so. The test to my mind is after all the sense of the veil, the veil of the Eastern woman, I mean; and you feel

more of a veil about that woman alone, any woman alone, than you do about a party of women. I bet you, if we watch a little, more men will be looking at the party than at that girl."

Sumner, reflecting how curiously the phrase "any woman alone" made Cliffe's attitude sound sentimental, glanced round and nodded vaguely. He had been caught meanwhile by hearing Marbrook beginning to develop to Ingram an idea that the voter of the labouring ranks had really as yet no consciousness of himself as a factor in government.

"The labourer has always looked upon government," Marbrook said, "as a pursuit followed by some of his social betters. These fortunate beings have nothing to do but a certain amount of management. Some of them, as he knows, manage only their estates, or business affairs, others, with more time or more energy, go in for managing the country."

"Ah, but," said Cliffe, "the extended franchise brought government to him, to his personal opinion."

"No," Marbrook answered, "and that's what's the matter in the country, and what all the fussing about intimidation and undue

country-house influence hasn't tackled. The extended franchise meant to the agricultural labourer that for some queer reason his masters decided to have more cards in the pack. He doesn't know why, but he can vaguely imagine some conjunction of circumstances in which one side, hard pressed, might suddenly have a notion of tapping a new vein."

Ingram liked this. "You explain completely," he said, "the sheepish, self-conscious manner of a lot of villagers at the poll. Hasn't one often enough noticed the half-snigger of the younger men, and the unnecessary dignity of the older ones? It's probably that they're entirely in the frame of mind Marbrook describes. They're not going to get above their station by appearing to think that the affair is any of theirs, and, equally, they're not going to be so ill-mannered as to be frivolous about affairs of the squire."

"Oh, come," said the shocked Peters, "it isn't as bad as all that. 'Affairs of the squire'—good heavens! You couldn't in the extreme case of an intimidated village lump it all up like that."

"We're generalising, bless you," Ingram answered, and Peters paused, to bring this into

some relation with what he called "generalising" in his speeches. It there meant taking a couple of specific cases, and beginning his next sentence "Now that sort of thing——"

Sumner came to the rescue. "But look here, men do go to meetings quite intelligently in villages, even to Liberal meetings. They're as political as can be in country pubs, too."

"Largely good manners," said Ingram. "I never said they didn't do the thing thoroughly. Marbrook's point is that they don't do it right, or at least don't do it as the trained men on our side are always imagining they do. The other side know better. Did you ever see a Tory candidate in a village who didn't strike you as having his tongue in his cheek?"

He was half-watching the ritual of the wild duck, the neat removal of the choice long slices, and the succulent crushing of the remainder of the bird in the press, the rich results of the process being poured over the pile of slices, which the waiter then offered for his approval before it was handed round. A sense of ritual seemed somehow to have descended for the time on the company, even though one was sure Peters had no notion of any such gastronomic business as was going on

behind his back. The men took the pause for a little more attention to their wine than they had yet given; and of all Ingram's small affectations that of choosing his claret was nearest to a real grace. It had fallen to his lot directly he came down from Oxford to travel with a young American millionaire, and he had determined to derive from the occasion some clear equipment of himself. In the end he had studied clarets at his ease, seizing with adroitness the kind of advantage that most distinguished this opportunity from others to come. Cliffe brought the party back to their subject with: "It's all rather rot after all. Look at Joseph Arch and his constituency."

"No more rot," Ingram took him up, "than most political outlooks. The utmost you can do in the way of subdivision for contemplative purposes is to think of main lines in classes. And in general I do believe it's true that the labourer has no idea of himself as a governing force."

"But," Peters' voice came in with a certain obstinacy. "every candidate on either side tells him he is. The sort of flattery a Tory candidate gives him is thicker than anything we do."

"Exactly. Their cleverness again. They

make it so fantastic that the labourer sees through it; it's like his wife being her ladyship's guest at a mothers' meeting tea; but, again for good manners, he doesn't say so. Is it likely that they believe that they're the masters because an educated man, whichever side he may be on, tells them they are?"

"The interesting moment," Marbrook reflected, "will be when they do believe."

"Anyway, if it's a question of new attitudes, we have a start," Ingram concluded, leaving Peters rather more bewildered than ever. "By the way," he suddenly added, "talking of constituencies, can anyone tell me the result of the West Pentshire? I couldn't get a paper."

"Pentshire? Whose seat?"

"Harry Matcham's."

"Oh yes; he's in all right."

"Good man!" said Ingram, "I must send him a wire. He's sure to be at Castle Morton."

"Oh yes; wire to Jonathan, do, David," Sumner mocked. "No Mount Gilboa lamentations yet. The sword of the mighty is not yet cast away, and the Morton influence is good enough for your polite villages."

"Run away and play, Sumner. You're get-

ting so Jewish in your references one might almost think you had been dining at the table d'hôte. Run away and play. In other words, come and see *Coppélia*."

"Hard work," Sumner answered. "I always have to hold my breath so long for fear of blowing Genée away. I'll come, though."

IV

THE session had been some weeks in progress when Ingram, idling after a late breakfast, heard five taps at the door of his chambers, and recognising the knock went to admit Matcham. It was one of the most cherished points of their friendship that they liked to share their idlings at a time in the morning when people for the most part are either too busy or too uncertain of temper to want company. And so far neither Ingram's under-secretaryship nor Matcham's appointment as unpaid secretary to a minor Minister had interfered with their habit. They exchanged now a few words, while they lit cigarettes, and Ingram sat down again. Matcham went over to the window, and stood watching a large vessel steaming down the river, enormous between Charing Cross and Waterloo Bridge, for all the fact that she showed at sea only as a dingy, diminutive coal-coaster. She was going down light; her propeller, half out of water, thrashed up a cloud of spray with a dis-

tressful action that looked as if she fidgeted in this feeble depth; and she bellowed loudly.

Ingram turned in his chair at her hoot. "Good old thing," he said. "She's a regular weekly friend of mine. I make out that she takes coal up to an electric power station, and coming down she's so worried by the confined waters, so uneasy with the barges swinging nearly broadside, she trumpets like a good-natured elephant."

Matcham said: "What? Oh, that—yes," and continued to smoke and stare. After a further minute or two he turned, and opened the piano. Neither man spoke. Ingram knew Matcham's range, and liked it. It covered little more than a score of songs, some folk-songs, others student-songs, and the sound of them had come to be little more than a variation of idleness. This morning Matcham played four or five melancholy tunes, and then struck into "Gaudeamus" with a vigour which clearly betokened the end of his reflectiveness. He looked up with determination, and obviously had a remark on his lips. But Ingram, as it happened, was not looking at him, and cut in before him with the upshot of his own meditations.

“We sha’n’t have many more mornings here. I’ve been making up my mind to a move. It’s very jolly here, with the river, and a bigger piece of sky than I’ll get anywhere else. But it’s no sort of an address, and I shall want a place where I can have people to lunch and dinner occasionally. And this place doesn’t run to much service. You know Mrs Jones’ breakfasts, but not even you know her lunches. I’ll be sorry to go, and yet one always believes somehow that there’s something better still in London. We enjoyed Chelsea immensely, didn’t we? And then I found this place, and you found Serjeant’s Inn, and we got endless tastes out of them. Six years ago I thought I’d never want to leave this, and now I only half mind.”

Matcham nodded, but said nothing. He looked round the room, being indeed almost as fond of it as Ingram was, with its carefully disposed, and often redisposed, prints on the walls; its pieces of furniture acquired one by one, yet not having the fact too obviously upon them, since none were superlative, and some were commonplace; its big oar slung aloft, an idol to which Ingram still sacrificed occasional days at Putney. Then Matcham broke out :

“Yes, you ought to move now. This, you know, wouldn’t have carried us much further.”

“What wouldn’t?”

Matcham waved a hand. “This kind of business—your chambers, my chambers. Breakfast at nine, lunch at the club, and dinner at the House. Our quite ridiculous little outbreaks of taste in inverted commas, like your prints and my chairs. Our decent spendings of our no more than decent incomes.”

“Well, as I said, I’m making up my mind to move.”

“Yes, but just to chambers again? I’m thinking that we’re growing out of them.”

Ingram risked a deliberate probing. “I don’t see any other sort of clothes quite waiting for us.” It drew no reply, so he added: “Unless your respected Parliamentary master is going to build a house for you.”

“It’s he that’s been worrying me,” Matcham said. “I’ve had an hour of him to-day. He’s an awful warning. A Cabinet Minister, and in ten years you and I will have to turn up Whitaker to see who it was that had his job. We shall have forgotten him clean. He’s a mere accident. He had a sort of ticket long ago, when his train was being started, and

somehow there's never been a station for him to get out at, so here he is."

"You want exercise, my dear chap. You're exaggerating."

"Yes, I know I am. But, really, what's he there for? I mean, when he's answered questions in the House, or done a day's work with a Bill, what is he? What does he get out of it?"

"What he wants to, I suppose, even if it's nothing."

"Well, you know, that can't be what he once did want. It comes back to us—what do we want?"

"Oh, we want quite enough to keep us going," Ingram replied easily. "We're not going to be too content and comfortable."

"Quite sure?" Matcham asked. "The blight can set in pretty early. Look at Newbold."

Ingram tried to concentrate his mind on Newbold; no striking light ensued from this contemplation, so he waited.

"I've been looking at him," Matcham continued, "and at a few other men. And all I see is premature stagnation. I don't mean necessarily a public form of stagnation. They may in time go as far as my chief himself; they're as good men for under-secretaryships as you are. But

however far they go they themselves will be stagnant from now on."

"Yes, it's queer," Ingram answered, "but it's pretty true. I can think of men myself. I wonder what's the reason."

"Don't know. I was only as far as seeing, rather frantically, if you like, that I wanted to do something active immediately, as a precaution."

Ingram smiled: "It was rather frantic. The thing that strikes me at the moment is, why should we notice that such men are not moving? After all, when hasn't the House been made up of six hundred men of some, but no special, account and the odd seventy, say, who have been and have done the biggish political things."

Matcham always got from Ingram this kind of steadying drive, when he came to him under the impulse of some idea or question. He responded to it now at once.

"That's true: why should we notice? Of course, there's this in it: the men one's thinking of came in with reputations. I suppose that makes us watch them."

"Yes; but so far as that goes, you know, they're doing all right. As you say, they'll

probably, or a fair proportion of them, go straight on—office and all that.”

“And it can’t be either that we expect *more* than office for the best of them. No; it’s something in the men that we have to put our fingers on, not what they’re doing or not doing.”

“Is it partly,” Ingram suggested, “that they don’t strike us as having extension enough? You know the kind of driving line men are apt to take in a debate or in questions that makes one simply shrug one’s shoulders. You say to yourself, ‘Heavens! does the man honestly think it’s as simple as that?’”

“Yes, I know. They seem to isolate, or insulate, if you like, everything they take up. They behave as if threads in politics should never have knots; and every thread must somewhere have a knot that, if you pulled it undone, would make Jacob’s ladders all over the stuff.”

“Maybe that kind of man likes Jacob’s ladders: he certainly feels himself to be a wrestling angel.”

“Quite good,” Matcham laughed.

“But it isn’t that—it isn’t their idealism that we’re quarrelling with, is it?”

“What they think idealism, perhaps. But then we’re back again, because we’ve got to put our finger on something in them to account for their muddle, and we’re no further ourselves.”

“You haven’t persuaded me that I want to be ‘further’ exactly. Why do you want to root me up?”

“Don’t know. But I wish we could extend.”

Ingram got up and looked in his turn out of the window. On the paths of the gardens below men were passing, some quickly, some with the boredom of people who had a sense of never doing anything for themselves from day to day, and year to year. On the river barges passed, and the faces of the warehouses on the opposite bank had a kind of grave activity, ropes swinging on the hoist of a sack to a high window, and workmen, tiny at that distance, moving with easy gestures on the edge of barge or shore. His thoughts shifted.

“Did you ever think how utterly different a London there is in that life?” he asked. “Those watermen belong as much to London as you or I; they’d call themselves Londoners, and you wouldn’t recognise their London, or they yours. It isn’t simply that they only know the river quarters, either.”

Matcham stood up and joined him by the window. "Same thing would be true, you know, of most of the men passing there in the gardens. We should astonish one another if we swopped our Londons."

"Ah, not in the same way. There's something you can't get over in the fact that a man who lives his life on water classes landmen in a lump as 'queer fellows.' It's his name for them, a real name, not a comment."

Matcham was not following, but Ingram saw a vague connection with their talk, and continued :

"That too comes back to our point. It's a question of what is our London, and what's going to be our London."

"Yes," Matcham agreed, "and, mind you, I'm not complaining of what it is. I think it's perfectly right so far. We're just ordinary people with enough understanding of London to know where to live in her, and how. But she's an old witch, and changes you unawares ; and I'm afraid if we don't look out we shall find ourselves labelled Bohemian."

"Oh, Lord !" Ingram groaned. "I'll go and live in Jermyn Street."

Matcham laughed. "Needn't quite do that.

But don't say I didn't warn you." He picked up his hat.

"Anyhow you've done your best to unsettle me; and all you seem to say in the end is that we mustn't do nothing, but must hardly do anything particular. Yet I half believe you know perfectly well what you're going to do yourself."

"Just immediately," Matcham answered, looking his friend firmly between the eyes, "I'm going to Castle Morton for Easter. There are going to be nearly enough rowing men to make a regatta—a four or two anyhow. Where are you going? Come too."

"Is the house quite as casual as that? Is the old man quite past being surprised by entirely stray men at his table?"

"Oh, it's all right, if you'll row. You're hideously fat," Matcham said, getting hold with difficulty of a small piece of Ingram's lean body, "but I daresay you could make some sort of show. That's always passport enough. I'll tell Cerney, and the party's his, in the main. His father takes it on whole-sale."

"Well, I'll be quite keen. The old lord always sounds interesting. To have such a

queer bombshell of a family, and never have it explode, is rather a triumph."

"Yes, and he's so fond of things going on. I don't know if that's cause or effect in connection with what you were saying about his family. I mean, I don't know whether he really cares to keep his family together, or whether it's because his family have always so amused him as a spectacle that he now likes a house full for its own sake."

"Do you really mean it?" Ingram asked, as Matcham reached the door. "I've nothing I'm set on for Easter, and I feel adventurous."

"Oh yes, I mean it. I'll get hold of Cerney at the House to-day. I'm sure it will be right."

V

INGRAM had known, if he had told Matcham all the truth, that he could really regard his Easter as arranged for, unless he deliberately chose otherwise. Indeed, Matcham hardly needed telling, for even on a basis of less intimacy than his, Ingram's attachment to the Richardsons was pretty well understood. It dated from Oxford days, when Ingram had spent one Long Vacation coaching the heir to the Richardson millions. What had put the connection on any more permanent footing he might have found it difficult to say. In the explanation he would, at any rate, have given great weight to the warm heart of the millionaire. Mr Richardson was a man who by a lucky business association in his early thirties had been able to have a hand in the opening of a new enterprise, which, prospering beyond all bounds, had made more than one millionaire. He must always have been a buoyant person, even in his poorer days, and in the course of years success translated this characteristic into

a jollity which, though ostentatious, was pardonable, because of a certain childish glee which animated it. He had lovable ways, even of giving impossibly lavish presents, and one of the most lovable was his habit of taking to anyone who was good to his son. The habit drew largely on his capacities for liking people, since it was not difficult to be good to the young man, who had, in a body that looked slight and frail, a sporting spirit, a great gift for games, and a plaintive but good-tempered bewilderment concerning all affairs of the brain.

But when allowance had been made for Mr Richardson's warm heart, Ingram would hardly have known what other fact to name as contributing to his association with the family. That might so easily have terminated with the exchange of the handsome cheque at the end of the Long Vacation ; but it had gone on to occasional weeks spent in Hampshire at Burlands, the millionaire's country house ; it had gone on even to other cheques, which Ingram could not honestly regard as earned, but which Mr Richardson, with all too knowing remarks about undergraduates' debts, insisted on handing over for no more than casual helping

of young Richardson over some impending examination. If the cheques were embarrassing, they were very private; and all that anyone would have gathered from Mr Richardson's conversation was that Ingram had been beyond measure kind in giving the boy a lift from the stores of his remarkable wisdom. When Ingram finally settled in town the friendship so progressed that it was fairly generally assumed by those who knew a good deal, but not everything, that Ingram's entry into Parliament had been financed by Mr Richardson. As a matter of fact, nothing so direct had happened; and Ingram's candidature had been made possible as candidatures usually are for poor men who are promising enough to be worth the party's while.

Ingram had begun of late to be glad that things were as they were. One day soon after the meeting of Parliament, when dining with the Richardsons, he recognised the growth of this feeling. Mr Richardson had naturally wanted to congratulate him, not only on keeping his seat but on his office also, and Ingram had accepted his invitation with some pleasure. He liked the prospect of being at last "somebody" in that house. Not that his position

hitherto had ever worried him; but he found, now that it was changed, that to have gone on longer with the family as clever, on the level on which he was accepted there as clever, without some achievement to show, would have been approaching the point of ridiculousness.

Mr Richardson's really flattering expression of pleasure he got in due time, though the head of the house had been a little late in appearing. At first he had to be content with the congratulations of the one daughter, Irene, who had possessed herself both of more body and of more brains than her brother; and of Mrs Richardson, a colourless lady, who got less pleasure out of money in a house where it flowed very freely than would have been thought possible. She had no scruples about wealth of any kind whatever; she thought it neither a burden, nor a snare, nor an opportunity. She was quite good-tempered, almost entirely passive, and enjoyed nothing. Her redeeming feature was that equally she disliked nothing. She had nothing to talk about, but that also was redeemed by her utter lack of any sense of grievance or offence, if no one attempted to talk to her. Her one character-

istic habit was wondering in an audible soliloquy at her own table what was the next course. She had never been known to be right about it.

Her congratulations were not striking. Irene's were warm, spiced with a delicate malice which she always employed with Ingram, and of which he had always been fond. It suggested to him, as far as he ever analysed it, that in this one spot of the household interest in him was deep enough to be rather searching. In younger days he had thought that Irene kept a fairly disillusioned eye on her household, and on the many people that circulated from time to time within it. The thought had not been unpleasant, because the people in those years were nearly all young and cheerful. Latterly, however, the idea had been more troublesome, because, as young Richardson grew up, the gay irresponsibility drained out of the house, and Irene's criticism took a harder surface. Towards himself her manner never appeared to change. She had always given him the impression that the gentle mockery in her friendly ways was at bottom a holding back from the readiness of the other members of the family to put him on a

pedestal ; he almost translated it into a promise that when he really achieved his laurels she would be more deeply aware of them, even more deeply moved by them. Nor did he alter his translation because of her words this evening ; there was no malice in the smile she gave him.

Her father, appearing with an apology after the rest had sat down, made the expected remark about Ingram's first rung of the ladder.

Irene said : " Really, father ! Do you think Jack has merely been walking round the bottom all this time ? Why, he looks half-way up already."

Ingram took it in her own tone. " Anyhow, he feels it. I'm as pleased as I can be, and I'll swallow any flattery."

" Can you hear us up there, if we shout very loud ?"

" Poor people ! I suppose I'm to see you down at the bottom, am I ? Why, you're on a nice secure tableland somewhere in the clouds, with no precarious ladder anywhere near."

" I'm not so sure of that," said Mr Richardson. " A good many of my friends would say

that the ladders of you despoilers are a bit too near our walls."

His guest laughed. He and Mr Richardson never talked politics, and the conversation dropped off to other interests. When the ladies left the table, Mr Richardson, who had been rather silent, answered a few remarks half-absently, and then came out on what he really had in his mind.

"Irene teases, Ingram, but of course we know you really have gone far, and we're awfully glad. You've seemed to belong so much to us. And I want you to remember that particularly at this moment, because I couldn't otherwise quite say what I'm going to. Frankly, it's this. Politics never yet made a man's fortune. You'll let me ask, won't you? what you're going to do. I mean—" he fidgeted with his wine-glasses—"you'll want to have money more or less off your mind if you're really going ahead. You mustn't be checked by that."

"Oh, well," Ingram answered, seeing none but a rather vague way of meeting this, "I've my small income, you know, and I've a little from my books. Men have gone far on less."

"That's true; but always, I should think, at a pretty heavy cost otherwise. I've been

wondering if this isn't the kind of moment at which a career like yours may turn a corner. I shall have to put it boldly; one always does have to in the end. It comes to this. I'd be quite glad to feel that your brains were in my business, for Charlie's sake by-and-by. I shouldn't overtax them now. You'd pick the essentials up easily, and you'd be free for your career, because every step in it would have more solid backing. I don't think you'd lose ideas, either. One branch of affairs doesn't suffer by association with another. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that a man is likely to be better at a political job if he has some other, but I don't expect you to agree entirely."

Ingram would probably have said to himself ten minutes earlier that he had got past the point of embarrassment with Mr Richardson's gifts. But he knew now that he had not. Luckily the whole offer was of a kind that he could quite properly, after due thanks, ask for time to look at. He felt that he wanted time indeed, when in the drawing-room a little later he suddenly found a "rider," so to speak, of his own fitting on to Mr Richardson's proposition. It came in a flash as he talked to Irene. He had always enjoyed her, had felt a queer

half-buried fineness in her detachment. Had he any deeper feeling than that? The question put itself to him for the first time. His recoil from the conjunction of this thought with what had just been passing in the dining-room was easily enough checked. The association was not a mercenary one, because obviously such a prospect as had opened out altered his whole position. Still, there was the difficult question whether what had happened had operated just as the removal of a barrier, allowing something genuine in him to pass quite simply and naturally to a new level, or whether he was by a separate step juggling his intimate self on to this level.

Certainly he had enough to carry away with him for meditation. The difficulties accumulated as he went further. Was it after all a "rider" of his own that he had added? Mr Richardson knew in his own way that Irene was not likely ever to do quite the expected thing, and that the fact that she might be expected, with all the money behind her, to make a socially successful marriage, would send her into a shell. True, she might be married in her shell; many girls were; but hers was a shell which could be formidable. Ingram saw

that Mr Richardson, without any deeply laid scheme, might have been struck with a new idea for his daughter. How, he might well have asked, in that case would matters be altered? Why should it be anything but a pleasure to him if his idea for the young man should work happiness for one dear to him? And at the back of all Ingram's questionings was the problem of whether he wanted his career to turn a corner. Perhaps, he felt at the end, before he dropped asleep, the various interweaving difficulties would all resolve themselves into that. If he made up his mind to take that corner, the rest had obvious ways of settling itself.

VI

CASTLE MORTON was almost as real as it looked. Its square massiveness of softly toned red brick, gleaming half-sleepily with faceted windows, and pinnacled with a forest of chimneys in marvellous twisted patterns, no two of which were alike ; its deep fragrant gardens, its moats, its mile-long avenue were things that stood as examples of their kind in the histories. The only trouble for its present owner, a man of subtle balances, was that its scale was of a past day. It belonged to a time when at the top of England were a handful of families still so near to days of insecurely seated kings that it was not absurd for them to show how nearly they were kings themselves, to live on a scale that could pass quite easily to the throne when the chance should offer. Those days passed for ever, the title that had signified the possibility became sunk in a crowd of newer titles, and yet Castle Morton survived undiminished. Its long tiers of windows, to a spectator who marked the

slight differences of pattern that made them run in groups, gave an idea of ranges of state rooms of a size to make you gasp. Its upper storeys could mean nothing less than the permanent presence of a little court of gentlemen-in-waiting, as well as however many guests and their servants his lordship chose to have. Round its great flagged courtyard little doors and windows opening under the cool brick cloister meant a whole line of rooms that nothing short of a royal regiment of guards, retainers, pages, huntsmen, falconers and led captains could have required. When you drove up the avenue, with the castle in sight all the way, you found that view changing almost uncomfortably to the kindred, but singularly different, sensation that the castle had you in sight all the way. The eminence on which it was built commanded a sweep of the domain in every direction clear of trees ; and the effect of the deep wide moat was to give the rising green ground, cut off abruptly at the top, the look of the perilous glacis of a fortress. When you crossed at last the moat, three parts of the space were on a wide brick bridge at the end of which the winged horses of the Mortons ramped on broad solid pillars, and the fourth part was a draw-

bridge which gave a sudden terrifying roar under your wheels. In the deep gloom of the gateway door-posts on either side were encircled with low stone seats worn into hollows by the armed men who once guarded the deeply cut grooves in which even to-day the ponderous portcullis slides down. As the carriage swung you uneasily over the flagstones of the court, you might have visions of some to whom a slight loss of dignity involved in the jolting must have been more than a mere discomfort, when the yard was full of retainers whose Morton colours and badges gave them the right to look, if not with insolence, at any rate with indifference at anyone who came under that arch unattended by the castle's lord.

Such was the nobility of the approach that, unless one were the owner—and an owner liable perhaps to the humorous view of one's posture—the new-comer surrendered himself but slowly to the more intimate aspects of the place. Yet when you had deeply absorbed respect for an Englishman's castle, you had to invert the proverb, and see that his castle was his home. The windows and doors under the cloister might indeed be small, heavy,

fortress-like ; but the windows that looked out over the cloister-roof were gracious, familiar, gay. These were for the most part windows of rooms where one lived ; and even those that showed a formality, the line on the north which let the sun through heraldic panes into the Long Gallery, and the line opposite whose pointed arches and darkened hues made you recognise the chapel, were by these very explanations not disturbing to the sense of domesticity. The great doorway opposite the entrance gate might, it is true, chill you with its glimpse—it stood so often open—of a wide, bare marble floor and soaring stone walls hung with armour ; but you could turn to your left, and catch sight, through the low arched passage piercing the house on that side, of broad grass paths between roses and frail high flowers.

But after all your first business as a visitor would naturally be with the hall, and following the gravely friendly butler, who loved young life as much as ever his lordship could, across the marble lozenges to one of the silently swinging doors, which looked so insignificant, and astonished you so much by their size as you went through them. The inner hall was one of Castle Morton's glories. Marqueterie work that

might have belonged—that pretty certainly had belonged—to the sacristy of an Italian cathedral, panelled half its height, and the broad staircase, not of oak, but of chestnut toning with the panelling, led you to the gallery railed in delicate lightness with the same chestnut, and hung with the Morton tapestries. The staircase climbed beside a regal window, bayed and built to the full height of the house, the perfect architectural balance on the eastern side of the great gateway on the west. The sea of glass was almost plain, save that along the top of the two lower tiers of lights ran family coats-of-arms, some that were not less of the family for being royal ; the uppermost tier bore boldly the Morton badge alone, repeated in light after light. As you went up the easy stairs you looked over an increasing vista of the park, down a slope of oak and elm to the river which so strangely bore at times the slim elegant shapes of racing boats, and up again beyond to the opposite slope, dotted with dwarfed, sparse-leaved, incredibly ancient oaks, in an ocean of bracken fronds.

It was only with his tenants and the neighbouring townsfolk, and with millionaires, that Lord Morton felt his home ridiculous in its

scale. To the former he always wanted to apologise for not being able to extend the semi-royal protection which alone could justify such a castle. To the latter he always wanted to say that he had no deluded idea that the thing was beyond price, as unprocurable as Windsor, which was what it still contrived to appear. To the rest of the world Castle Morton's owner adjusted himself perfectly. Those who wanted the perfection of hospitality found it here; and those who chose to savour the tact and ease of it could never find their appreciation of such qualities outrunning the depth of them. Those who met the old lord in antiquarian societies found him keen as any dry-as-dust in learning the few things he did not know about the place. The young generation that Lord Cerney, his heir, brought him from Eton and Oxford found that their learning, their rowing, their cricket, their cheerful views on art and architecture and history and life grew somehow touched here with a golden lightness, a power of smiling a little at themselves, that they probably attributed to the secular polish of the place, but that came in truth from the thin old gentleman with oval head and small pointed white beard, who

seemed at one and the same moment to be both talking in the heart of any group of his guests and encompassing their circle with quiet amused eyes.

Charles, eleventh Earl of Morton, had not been born in the direct succession. It is apt to irritate our sense of the orderly when, in reading the alas! exploded pages of the Peerage, we see the direct line fail, when the successive entries of "His lordship died on such-and-such a date and was succeeded by his son" come to an end, and we read instead "was succeeded by his kinsman"; and we have to hunt back laboriously to find a name printed large in the otherwise interminable monotony of the descendants of a younger son of the seventeenth century. Yet the present earl's was a case to reconcile even an exacting reader to such breaks of continuity. In general these dull younger branches give you nothing but holders of family livings, and all but family commissions, dowagers with their carefully Belgravian addresses in brackets after their names, or men whose very clubs suggest to you boredom and a bland faith in family. It had been the good fortune or good management of the Mortons to keep a beautifully expert hand on

the tap of sinecure public offices ; and one of the reasons why such offices lasted unconscionably long in our history was that Mortons filled them in such unostentatious succession. There was never anything to make the public aware of their being filled. If there had ever been any publicity, for instance, about the appointment of Clerks of the Great Wax-Box, that purely ornamental appurtenance of the Great Seal, some tiresome persons might have asked what duties the Wax-Box involved. What, again, could have been the result of any curiosity about the Controller of the Knots, except a decision that England did not need a special and well-paid officer to see that the bundles of writs after a General Election were properly tied up and put away? Again, the whole business of stationery perquisites among officials of the Crown and of Parliament was flagrant enough without the added fragrance of an Appointer of the Quires, in which office a minor Morton had for so long drawn eight hundred a year. And the money that was made by engrossing Bills and Acts of Parliament for members, for petitioners, for private bill promoters, who would rather have had them printed if absurd old privileges had

not blocked the way, all paid its toll to another Morton who, as Serjeant of the Engrossers, never went nearer to Westminster than the top of St James's, where he turned into White's. A process of this kind is too expensive to the nation even for the production of such a fine type as the eleventh Earl of Morton, and it is well done with. But meanwhile it produced him. Had he been born of the main line he would have been from his earliest years so set about with the width of his heritage that he would never have known what other men thought about life. Had he been born of a family whose younger branches ran the narrower courses, he would have acquired the stiffness of the family living, the pepper of a commission, or at the worst the futility of an old bachelor in chambers. As it was, since it is not your sinecure-holder himself who does not take his office seriously, Charles Morton came of a line who felt themselves part of the blood-system of Court and State, who were official and yet idle, but—most formative point of all—who had every social possibility at their feet for the mere price of developing a personality. Some of them did not pay the price; they had their offices, went to their clubs, and died.

But Charles Morton, born amid the reverberations from the lives of Byron and Shelley, when the earlier chilliness was being replaced by an appreciation of ardent, æsthetic youth, was soon a personality, and a personality of a type curiously attractive to the head of his house, who had become by the death of his only son last of the direct line. That old gentleman, having consorted much, but not too much, with the bucks of the Regency, found his later life enlivened by the discovery that the young man on whom the succession fell had been assuming, on a hopelessly inadequate income, the costly pose of a man of taste. As his own early life had been pose he made great friends with the new heir; and, as his whole later life had been a dignified retirement from the political effects of the Reform Bill into such personal graciousness as that Bill could not touch, the new heir learned from him both how noble life could be, and how empty, when detached from national developments.

Those who saw the two together in the middle of last century were many, and the accounts they left of their impressions are not few. Pleasant glimpses they give of the two

men, the old and the young, almost always together. Now and then a tang of sharpness creeps in, for some of the contemporaries of the old lord's wild youth were a little jealous of the quiet, serene evening of his life. It was Palmerston who said of him that many Regency bucks had found unexpected sons as they grew up, but it was not fair that one of them should positively profit by it. In his gibe he put his finger on the secret of the relationship. The older man, though he never analysed it, thoroughly enjoyed having all the advantage of an elegant, finished heir without any of the subtle frictions of the parental relation. The two never quarrelled, because there was no reason why they should not ; they lived delightfully together, because there was no reason why they should ever be housemates. The young man, who had acquired thus suddenly a life of immediate completeness and wide horizons, was in no haste to marry. The result had been that he was already an elderly man when his son was of companionable age. He had other children, two more sons and three daughters, but he only really knew his heir ; though he found the others, as they grew up, sufficiently entertaining to form a circle of acquaintances.

They had, by this course of events, been the children almost entirely of their mother, an energetic, capable woman of an erratic family, which, having made much history in the past, and finding that history was not now wanted of it, broke off at queer angles, and threw up a peer who embraced Confucianism and reburied his ancestors in his garden; a younger son who collected uncut jewels and waistcoats until his credit broke, and then died in a coruscating bankruptcy; and women who had large families, to which they gave an almost regimental appearance by always moving them wholesale, whether in political directions, philanthropy or frivolity. Lord Morton's younger children were thus a little regiment, separate from himself and his heir; and the point of Ingram's jest, when he was talking to Matcham about Castle Morton, was that the regiment's friends were apt to turn up on the regiment's invitation; while Lord Cerney, the heir, had quite properly, the old lord considered, the right to ask his own friends, who were not, as a rule, the regiment's. In the course of time a kind of system had grown up, which prevented too much overlapping. When it was known that Cerney was going to be down at

the Castle the regiment did not ask many friends ; and this was a rule especially observed for Cerney's rowing parties. He had got his Blue at Oxford, and many other things year after year at Henley ; and it was from a chance invitation given one day to a crew in which he was rowing, and which had been ordered a week-end "off," that the now famous rowing parties had begun. Even Cerney had not understood till then what a delightful father he had. Dinner on the evening of the crew's arrival had turned into the most glorious orgy of rowing "shop," with the old man rattling away at the head of his table, reviving his own rowing days. Once or twice afterwards he had invited his son's college crew to come and train for a week or two before Henley on his water ; and he was never so happy as when astonishing his butler by giving orders which should turn the normal routine into training routine. He loved seeing the conventional elegances and luxuries of his table swept off before the solid square meals of a crew ; he loved the detached air of the butler with nothing but beer to draw ; he loved the almost timid joy of the housekeeper in finding all the bedrooms of the party under her hand at seven-

thirty in the morning. And the more casual, the less specific, rowing parties gave him none the less the true flavour; and as they were mostly of rather older men, who had to love rowing much to be going on with it at all, the level of the "shop" in the evening went up a bit, and flickered into fine large theories of rowing mechanics.

CHAPTER VII

IT had been a glorious Easter Saturday, and the hour for "slacking" was perfect. The level sunlight was still warm, and in the circle of long chairs on the terrace the men had pulled the brims of their hats down over their eyes. It gave the party a half-somnolent summer look. Indeed, as conversation had for the moment dropped, the circle might almost have been said to be wholly somnolent, and the thought seemed suddenly to strike one of them, who sat up in a creaking chair, and said: "I say, you men, we aren't after all a togger at tea."

There was a lazy laugh or two, and one of the daughters of the house said:

"Oh, you haven't done so badly. You all talked quite nicely till five minutes ago. I suppose if we had proper feelings we should have withdrawn before now. But it's very jolly here, and I don't believe you want us to go."

"Not a bit," said Matcham, from another of

the long chairs. "We're too happy to want anyone to do anything. But I suspect Lady Jean of taking us all in with her calm eyes for future reproduction in her speeches."

Lady Jean, a pretty girl with a beautiful head, that seemed to gather into its quick graceful movements all the life of her body, smiled at Matcham, and asked :

"What do I want to reproduce you for? The typical attitude of man, in possession of the easy-chair with his eyes carefully screened? But why mayn't I, as a matter of fact, be slacking as much as you?"

"Ripping, isn't it, Lady Jean?" said a cheerful undergraduate, a recent Blue, no other in fact than Nicholson, the new Oxford stroke, who had pulled the last boat race out of the fire between the Bull and Barnes Bridge.

"Yes, it is, sensible man of the party. And I think Mr Matcham was horrid."

"Mr Matcham, you see," said that person, "has reason to remember your speeches, while Nicholson need remember nothing except that you pretended to be awfully interested in his sculling this afternoon."

"I didn't pretend to be interested in your speeches."

“Not much. But I’m blown if I’ll be a suffragist, all the same.”

“Well, I’ll be a rowing enthusiast from this time forth. You’ve never been half so jolly about it or so honest, and I suppose it’s the effect of an afternoon’s rowing. You’re quite beautifully definite for once, which you never were at your meetings. And that’s a kind of triumph for me, because the next best thing to reporting a convert is cataloguing an unmitigated opponent. My society will be so grateful.”

“These frightful organisations of the Inquisition,” murmured a sleepy man. “They open under our feet in our least political moments.”

Lady Jean was beginning hotly to explain that it wasn’t she who opened the subject, and that she didn’t a bit want to be political, when Cerney remarked that that was the way violent politics always began.

Nicholson said: “Well, no one ever accuses me of being political, so take me for a walk, Lady Jean, to show that you mean what you say.”

The two went off, and Cerney began to talk about possible races on Monday. The party

would hardly run to more than pair and sculling races, but it might be possible to manage two fours, if there were two light boats sufficiently sound. Most of the men were quite ready by this time to go back to the beloved subject, and pulled themselves out of their chairs to return to the boat-house, and look at the craft—an occupation rowing men love. They had a couple of fours out on trestles in a minute or two, and stood gravely about them while Cerney talked to the boatman, one of a famous family of Oxford boat-builders, who was growing comfortably stout in this soft job, but could yet scull any of them to a standstill.

“What do you think, Ted?” said Cerney. You have to open the ball by very general approaches with a waterman.

“Well, my lord, I don’t think either of them will sink”; a waterman always responds by general statements.

The ball having been opened, the men began to handle the boats, as if a proper ritual had now been observed. They stroked the smooth cedar skins, pressing their thumbs here and there on the joints, and watching the thin wood recover its springiness. Cerney and the boatman turned one of the fours over, and tried their

force on riggers, and rolled the slides up and down. The boatman ran his finger and thumb over some of the nuts. Cerney said: "Let's have them into the water, Ted, and leave them a bit, while we go over the oars. I believe they'll do."

Ingram meanwhile had stayed on the terrace with Lady Rose, the eldest daughter of the house, and Matcham. When the circle began to break up, he had had no other thought than that of strolling off to the river with the rest of the men. Then he had an impulse not to move, and looking across to Matcham had been aware of something like a mute invitation to stay. The feeling had been strong enough to start a sudden train of connection in his mind; and, though nothing followed between the three beyond comfortably lazy remarks at intervals, he knew that the atmosphere had grown more vital around him. Happy as he had been down at the river, he had had at tea a return of the very real shyness with which, after all the light-handed acceptance of the visit, he had found himself actually coming down to Castle Morton. But at the moment a fresh ease had come to him, a silent sense that something intimate in his friend's life was creating for him an associa-

tion that would make easy the superficial brisk exchanges of a house-party, for which he had at first felt little in trim. So he sat now, and turning from the park looked with more pleasure into the vaguely rich shadows of the great room which opened on the terrace ; the polished floor like still dark water ; the cabinets and pictures, that were so charming a possession for guests who had at least the right things to say, if they had no more ; the grouped chairs, which suggested such happy personal groupings at the price of your being yourself up to them. Something in Ingram's glances about him caught Lady Rose's attention, and she was hospitably prompt to interpret, though Ingram could not be sure how deep her interpretation went. She said :

“I'm forgetting that you've not been here before, Mr Ingram. Wouldn't you like to wander ? Do, if you'd like to. Or shall we all go and see the garden ? It's rather pleasant even now.”

So in the shadow on the long narrow terraces the three moved round to the drawbridge, and turned beyond the moat towards the garden. They crossed another moat to reach it, for an eighteenth-century earl, filled with a love for

the place which had fortunately issued in less deplorable results than those of most eighteenth-century designs, had had the fancy of moating the garden. It formed a second little enclosure, its mellow walls rising just far enough from the moat's edge to leave a lovely close-cropped walk all round ; and the moat was with singular adroitness so contrived that this walk, and indeed the whole garden, was saved from any sense of isolation from the park, the trees of which leaned across, and sent a delicious moistness and coolness over the walls. On the side where you entered the garden was a fore-court, a wide space of lawn with an old mulberry-tree, a hornbeam, and two or three chestnuts. From this a narrower opening led into the square garden with its grass paths crossing at right angles.

Ingram, standing in the fore-court, looked back at the castle, a façade of wonderful decorated straightness, the tall gleaming windows in their mullions of cunningly rubbed brick, the tall lines of the projections from ground to roof which stayed up the weight of the walls like slim buttresses, the chimney-pillars of diamond, zigzag, chequer brickwork. Then he looked over his shoulder at the flowery

straightnesses of the garden, and under the impulse that had just come to him said :

“How beautifully ordered, and how gracious !”

Lady Rose after a moment said : “The two must go together, mustn’t they ?”

“Exactly. But, dear me, you’ve got to have space and a few centuries, as well as many other things, to get them.”

He turned towards the garden, and Lady Rose, as they strolled forward, took him up again :

“Ah, but we haven’t all got to make them, each for ourselves, have we ? Of course,” she continued quickly, seeing that she had said something which only she could carry on, “I don’t mean that everyone’s going to have our tremendous luck of coming into a place like this. But aren’t there everywhere regular orderednesses and graciousnesses in life for people to have, if they choose ?”

“Each in our own rank, you mean ?” Ingram said. “Well, I think that’s rather a hard saying. Does it amount to more than ‘content with that station of life to which it has pleased God to call us’ ? And you know we’re all against that now. We think it paralysing.”

"Still," Lady Rose answered, "if you didn't mean much the same kind of thing, you were being superficial. A discontented earl wouldn't think all this gracious."

"No ; that's true. He might want to have a Garter to carve all over the place."

"The fact is," Matcham struck in, "that Ingram's in a fearful mood of superficiality. He wants to do something to his circumstances."

Lady Rose smiled : "Why, what's the matter with them ? Tired of office already ?"

"Oh no. It's Matcham really who wants me to expand, to splash, I verily believe, and blow trumpets."

"What a character you're giving one another, Mr Ingram ! And we've all thought you the patient, toiling men of modern politics, getting ready to march to our head with an army of workers, and cross the ford to Canaan. If you turn back from the plough, why, everyone else will."

She spoke lightly, but there was a shade of real concern in what she said. Ingram felt her seriousness, and met it :

"Ah, no, Lady Rose ; I'm not backing down. Though, if I had gone into politics to

work that idea, I should be quite fairly treated if it ended by 'landing' me. No—honestly I care far too much, not about the conditions of those people, but about what they're going to make of politics. And you know they've got to make something. It's a kind of impertinence to bother about their conditions, as such; and besides, that's a concern one can't take up permanently. You can only trouble about their conditions, either from your point of view or from theirs, if you're doing it incidentally, as it were—a side-issue of a long view. That's why the Church people can do it; one needn't point out their long view. A politician has to do it by the way, while his main line is trying to make politics for them."

This explanation was more than Ingram was in the habit of giving, and Matcham was smiling contentedly. He kept quiet, walking on Lady Rose's other hand by the tulips that were beginning to flame, the banks of wallflowers, and the daffodils and early narcissus. Lady Rose was also silent for a little. Ingram had been making a distinction which people did not usually observe at work in his life, and it interested her. Then she said:

"Well, we won't say that you've gone into

politics to work, as you put it, the idea of Canaan for your people. But as long as that's in effect what will be the end of your work, isn't it enough?"

"Oh, I don't know that my discontent is very important," Ingram smiled. "When Matcham indulges in it, I says it's want of exercise."

Matcham, refusing to be drawn, left it to Lady Rose to go on.

"Well, if that's all that his remarks are worth, we can dismiss his wanting you to expand and to trumpet."

"I did dismiss it," said Ingram, and then half-reflectively: "Queerly enough I seem here to have got somehow a little more on the track of what one does want. I believe it is——" he broke off with a little laugh. "But that would be soliloquising."

"No, do go on," she said, and Matcham looked up.

"I don't think I can quite get it, after all, but I seem to see that a lot of politicians working, as they think, for the sake of poorer, less fortunate people may produce a kind of political pauperisation. And we're always told that that's as bad for the pauperisers as for the

other side. If we haven't a range of life, an order of life, and a definite political standing-place of our own, how are we going to make them for other people?"

"But surely you and the rest of us don't lack that?"

"Ah, you mustn't say 'the rest of us,' Lady Rose. That's part of the muddle. I doubt if we—Matcham and I and our like—can do much good while we are lumped in with you."

Their strollings in and out along the garden paths had brought them once again to the entrance, and this time they paused at it and turned out through it. The dressing bell was ringing, and Lady Rose went in, while the two men lingered to be overtaken by the group they saw moving up from the river. Neither of them spoke until Matcham, just before the other men reached them, said:

"By-and-by, dear man, you'll have to tack what you've just been saying on to our talk of the other day. I don't quite see where it hangs on. But I liked your opening out so."

"Did I open out?" Ingram asked.

"Oh yes, you're all right. Dinner's going to be jolly." He knew Ingram so intimately

that he felt free to give these little lifts now and then ; and afterwards the flood of chatter up the staircase of the bachelor wing floated the shy man over the last glimmer of his shyness.

VIII

CERTAINLY no shyness remained when Ingram found a very special place awaiting him at table. It was part of the gaiety of these parties that there was no formal allotment of the guests at dinner. The mistress of the house and her daughters were always open to formal attendance, and of course had it; but after they had led the way the old lord usually followed informally with the rest of the men. It was his custom on entering to stand in his place, and ask two men to come and sit by him, and Ingram found himself one of the two. He had from this the most comfortable sense of being taken into the party. The young Oxford Blue was on the other hand of his host, and for part of dinner the talk at that end of the table was only of rowing. The Belgians were at the height of their fame, and their style could be discussed endlessly. Nicholson questioned whether in rowing, which depended so much on extreme exactness in catching the right moment, any but an extra-

ordinarily perfect crew could really "row itself out." The old lord, taking up a side-issue of this, said that what he always felt to be the weakness of the Belgian style was that it could not be a sound, amusing exercise for all manner of oarsmen. It was rather a gymnastic trick; and, if it were ever to take hold here, he felt that lower boats in a school, or college, or club would degenerate into mere play, while the one or two best crews would be specialised out of all that real connection with the rest which makes a lower-boat boy feel himself already a bit of a Blue.

Lady Jean, from a little way down the table, asked for Ingram's help in a political point under discussion between her and her neighbour. That turned the current of conversation at the head of the table. The old lord after a little silence said:

"I feel as if all one wanted to do in politics just now, Mr Ingram, were to ask questions. One is really bewildered, and one wants to know what is happening and going to happen. I don't want to exaggerate, but how are we to get our bearings?"

"Are the landmarks after all quite so swept away, sir?" Ingram asked. "There's the inevit-

able recurrence of elections, the plainest landmark of all, and every Government has the skull at the feast; the biggest majority must be remembering, quite as much as the smallest, that it has to be as sure as it can that it's only doing what is asked for."

"But our uneasiness is that, when you say 'what is asked for,' you are thinking only of what some people ask."

"Is it possible in politics to mean more than that? I think it's perfectly fair to mean by 'what is wanted' the decision of the larger number of heads."

"Ah—'heads'"—his host smiled.

Ingram laughed, and went on: "There, you know, sir, you're saying nothing peculiar to this election. Had the old hustings voter any better sense of politics than the ten-pound occupier to-day? At any rate, if he had, didn't he generally vote on some quite different basis?"

"I don't care what basis it was, and I'll admit as much as you like that the old voter had precious little political intelligence. But what that meant was that your politics in the very beginning, in the elections themselves, were managed by educated people. The elector

voted more or less (I'm speaking of the mass) as he was told, and the people who did the governing for the most part did the telling. They settled their respective lines and marched up their armies. To-day I don't hear the governing people doing any telling; and the electors don't seem to me to know they are governing."

"As for your marching up of armies, sir, they're not so far off that in America, with the Tammany organisation."

The old lord was ready: "No, they're not armies in America. An army beyond a certain size must almost inevitably be a mob. I was thinking of days altogether less unwieldy."

"Then we are right back at the old Reform Bill dispute. But are you just about your army? Is it mere compactness of size that makes it? Surely it's command and organisation, and a more or less corporate intelligence, even if the effect of the intelligence amounts to no more than a consciousness of nationality—patriotism."

"Well, I'll grant you that, because I don't think you can show me either the command or the organisation, even if I admit the

possibility of the intelligence; and I do think that is there, on the level on which you put it."

"I daresay I couldn't. I don't think we've worked it out, because, so to speak, our armies have never yet simply fallen in on parade. They go into action at certain times, but no one quite knows what's in them, or where the commissioned ranks begin."

"Ah," the old lord made a charming little bow, "we've some badges of that, which I'm happy to see you wearing."

The moving of the ladies made a smiling return of the bow quite sufficient answer, and when the men re-sorted themselves Matcham, who had been aware of the conversation, came into a chair by Lord Morton. Ingram said :

"I'm not going to give up my pleasant place, sir, except by order, for if you really could tell Matcham and me what rank we have we should be very grateful."

Lord Morton was just beginning to reply when he checked himself, and turned his glass slowly in his fingers for a few moments. Then he said :

"Well, really this is extraordinarily inter-

esting. I was on the edge of replying, quite naturally, that you're both members of Parliament, Liberal members of Parliament, and thinking that that would place you. But of course that isn't what you want, and when I checked myself I was suddenly seeing that it doesn't in fact place you. I'm not sure, though. Wouldn't it be true that your regiment in the army, so to speak, is the regiment of social workers, and that your seats in Parliament make you commissioned men in the regiment?"

"The weak spot there," said Matcham, "is —isn't it?—that you can't very well have a regiment of an army which professes to be looking after the army. All social workers you must look at as commissioned in some sense."

"It's rather puzzling. I think you must take it that Parliament, Lords and Commons, makes your commissioned ranks, and be content with that."

"Lords, Commons—and platform speakers," Ingram amended. "Heaven knows, the speakers do enough ordering about."

Lord Morton smiled. "Yes, how immensely that has grown up in the last twenty or thirty

years. As late as my middle age no one made political speeches even to his constituents except at election times, and perhaps once a year besides. Now you've got practically a profession of platform speaking."

"Ah, we can put them into a regiment, I think," Matcham said. "Call them the engineers, ordered out to entrench, and bridge, and make roads."

"They certainly throw up an infernal amount of dust. I'm afraid it's always difficult to see your professional politician as doing more than that."

"Be careful, sir," Matcham laughed. "It's just putting your noses in the air, and seeing only the dust, that sends you tumbling into their trenches."

"Yes, by Jove! we've certainly tumbled in now, and we ought to know that they are digging."

"Of course they are," said Ingram, "and I think your classification of 'professional politicians' is partly what blinds you. Honestly, you know, practically all of them really care for what they're speaking about. They want to move people on."

"Well, I won't be a cynic, or I might say

that the moving on they most want is for themselves. But you must let me say that it's unfortunate they so often get it, for it's altering your House of Commons very much. You've too many men there whose feet are on nothing but platforms."

"If you come to that, sir," Matcham smiled, "I don't know where else Ingram's or my own are."

Lord Morton meditated a moment, and went on: "Well, you do belong, you know, to something new in politics. I don't know if you've ever considered yourselves as a class, but I quite agree with you that you need some defining. Tell me if I bore you, but I'll give you what I see, and perhaps you can comment on it. Most people, I know, talk about the Labour party as the great new factor; and so, of course, in a way it is. But it is so clear-cut, both in its political position and in every other aspect, that it doesn't much interest an onlooker like me. I'm more concerned with the really considerable number of men like yourselves, men who come down from universities, and, instead of going into the Church, or school-mastering, or civil services, go into Parliament. You've only lately begun doing it. I know

there have always been a few men who went into Parliament in an academic kind of way—Macaulay, I suppose, would be your great example—but now it's quite common. And what interests me still more is this. Macaulay, to take that example (it's the only one I can think of at the moment), took himself seriously enough, goodness knows, as a politician; but he was pretty careful, all the same, to make himself a personage as well. And I imagine you'd always find men doing that who went into Parliament on anything but what I might call either a family basis—your usual sons of peers, squires, and so on—or a business basis, like your lawyers, who've always wanted M.P. as well as K.C. after their names. Men who wished to get into Parliament simply because they were clever and had ideas, either attached themselves to a great family's pocket borough, like Gladstone in the old days, or did it jackal-fashion, like John Wilson Croker. Anyway, I seem to see always the notion in their minds of being a personage, to put it that way, as well as—more than—an M.P. The new thing about young men nowadays—and, of course, I'm not saying whether it's good or bad, I only want your ideas—is that they don't seem

to me to have any general ambitions. I dare say it's admirable; they have their interests in their work, in social conditions, in any number of "questions." But an old man like me finds, when you put it to him, that he can't say what or where they are. Do talk about it; it interests me so much."

Ingram had more than once exchanged a glance with Matcham while Lord Morton was speaking, and he now looked again at him, as if to see who should answer. Matcham gave him a little nod, so he undertook it:

"Not more than it interests us, sir. You've hit on a thing that we were puzzling over. We were wondering why one feels about such a lot of the comparatively young men in the House, men more or less of our set, or of our type, that they're already stiffening, and are probably going to stagnate. What really puzzled us was that it doesn't seem to make any difference at all if they're successful in the normal Parliamentary way—I mean, if they go on to office. You'll have men in your own mind, men of the kind I mean. And I believe you've given us the clue we wanted. They are really not in any atmosphere, they have no distances or perspectives. They are

just M.P.'s, only a little more Memberish when they lose their seats than when they win them."

The old lord nodded. "You're putting it—though you know that—too strongly. But go on."

"Oh, I'm afraid we've only arrived at discontent. But it is depressing. We were saying that out of the six hundred and seventy members only about seventy or so can be even in the normal way of office successful. Our puzzle was why in the odd six hundred we should be noticing so many men critically."

"Well, you see, in the old days one didn't notice them critically, because the odd six hundred were for the most part, were almost entirely, men who were in Parliament by the way, as part of their business. They didn't stand or fall by their place there, for they were squires, heirs to titles, later on big business men, anyhow men whose position in the world was clear. I don't say they always filled it well, but they had a place, had a standing. And, do you know, I'm immensely encouraged by what you've said. Whether you young men will find it better to make for yourselves a position, not beside, but, as it were,

all round your political one, I don't know. But if you don't it will have done you good, I'm sure, to decide distinctly not to. And I haven't bored you? Good. Shall we move, Cerney?"

IX

THE Sunday afternoon began in the half-sleepy restlessness which generally accompanies that time in an English country house. Only the ladies of the party seemed to have any definite intention of doing nothing, or any knowledge of how to do it. The men mostly met one another in odd corners, when the union of their cigarettes after lunch had broken up, and each one suddenly tried to look as if he were on the way to some room or other where he meant to settle. The very young men, of course, came off best, contriving, as they always do, by some curious communication of spirit, to congregate, and talk their own shorthand. They captured a summer-house in the garden, where they "ragged" one another, and were happy. Cerney retired heavily to the library, with a stack of unanswered letters from constituents, and went to sleep. Ingram, in a mood of flatness, seeking the billiard-room ran against Cowdray, a youthful but exalted servant of the Board of

Education ; and worked off some of his mood by suggesting to him all sorts of points in which the Code system and the Training College system were still hampering education. Having heard from Cowdray, as one always hears from youthful but exalted educationists, that the Board were at that moment meeting, or had last week disposed of, all those points, Ingram tried to feel better, and wandered off to the library, where he shamelessly woke up Cerney. That young man, with some constitutional readiness inherited from an ancestor who must have known how to sleep on the Treasury Bench, broke instantly into as much denunciation of letter-writing constituents as if he had been dealing with them uninterruptedly.

“What do you do, Ingram?” he asked ingenuously. “Look here, what’s one to say to a man who writes me an amazin’ pompous letter, tellin’ me to vote against one of your Bills, and I can’t read which it is?”

“Oh, if it’s a pompous letter,” said Ingram, “don’t you bother. He’s just copied a form sent round by some organisation, for constituents to forward to members.”

“Really, by Jove!” Cerney was delighted.

“I say, though,” he added, “you’re sure he won’t get some skittles club or other to vote against me? Bit of a pity, all the same. I rather like writin’ nasty letters about your Bills, when I’m feeling energetic.”

Ingram was strolling round the brass-wired bookcases, and he laughed. “Must take a good deal of energy, doesn’t it?”

“Oh no; capital good thing to do between divisions. You see, your Bills are always so jolly easy to say nasty things about. If I can’t say anything about the Empire, I can say something about attacking employers of labour, or the upsetting of our benevolent land system. And Tariff Reform’s quite easy, you know, with a bit of coaching. Not that I believe in it—isn’t going to do estates much good, that I can see. But one has to have something encouragin’, don’t you know, to say about unemployment.”

“Yes, you do score, I think,” Ingram answered, always with a book in his hand as he strayed by shelf after shelf. “We usually have to explain ourselves more than you do. We’ve usually got hold of the complicated end of a question.”

“It’s your own affair, of course,” said Cerney,

“but it seems to me it’s your own faults. After all, why do people let us talk to them as they do? I believe—only you’re a lot more clever than I am—that they’re sort of more in our hands than in yours. I mean, they think we know what we’re after, and they think they know what you’re after. Sounds awful rot, I’m afraid; but then, bless us all! I sha’n’t have to make speeches all my life, so it don’t much matter.”

“Not rot at all,” Ingram replied; “sounds to me like the best of sense. By Gad!” he suddenly broke off, “here’s the Aldine Livy. How much of that kind of thing have you got, Cerney?”

“Oh, a fair amount, I think. I’m rather keen on them. You see, my father told me all about ’em, when I was at Eton, and I remember getting quite keen on Livy for Groups at Oxford. It made a difference somehow to know a copy of him that was printed when they first rediscovered the old boy. Gave me a sort of feeling of being in the morning of it, don’t you know?”

Ingram sighed vaguely, and asked:

“Did you only take Groups at Oxford?”

“Yes. I think I was rather an ass, because

I might have got a class in history. I didn't mind working, either. But of course I was keen on my Blue, and I didn't want to bungle that." Cerney got up, and stretched. "Come up to the top of the park. Do us good to have a bit of a grind."

The walk at any rate so far absolved Ingram of such Sunday duties that, when various pairs and groups set stoutly forth after tea, he felt himself allowed to do no more than idle by the moat, and drop crumbs to the two big pike that lived in it. Lady Morton, passing him on a stroll by herself, said:

"Old Age Pensions, Mr Ingram? They're about seventy years old."

"Oh, Lady Morton, I hope the pensions, when they arrive, will go a little further. Ten minutes of this don't fill a pike."

He turned, and fell in beside her, and answered some motherly questions as to where he lived in town, and how he liked office, and even what he did with his days. She was always looking out for recruits for her crusades of social reform. He pleaded his many activities; but, as she had never found her own energies fail, she was not inclined to let him off on that score. She

secured him to speak at a meeting a fortnight ahead, and left him as if that had been all she had come out for. He returned to the pike, but having now no crumbs dropped cigarette ashes instead, at which the pike swirled up each time, and managed to go away again without loss of dignity. He was meditating on this indication that even fish in lordly shadows are devoid of self-consciousness, when he heard the church bell across the park, and in a generally receptive mood went in for his hat, and walked over to evening service. He found Lady Rose and Matcham in a pew, and joined them. The hour ran its course of the familiar and the expected. The curious comfortable warmth of an evening service spread slowly from the people and the oil lamps; the ten minutes before service were full of scattered outbreaks of trampling up the aisles; the big bells ceased, and the little bell began tinkling; and he had the strangest, most soothing sense that it was all-important. He could feel the mutual mild interest of the people, who, living all in the same village, hardly saw one another except at this hour of the week. He could feel the settling down of all the lovers, who, having

seen one another in the pews, knew they would have their silent ecstatic walk home. The choir clattered in, managing to make even surplices look awkward, and when at last the congregation rose to the first sound of the rector's voice, Ingram floated himself off on the rising into a frankly sentimental mood. He listened to the lessons with the old sense of luxurious laziness which he used to have at school, when the reading of the lessons was physically the best part of the service, because you could sit down and do nothing, and yet were not wearied as by the sermon.

The rendering of the Canticles surprised him. He had never before heard the *Magnificat* sung slowly, as in awe, and the *Nunc Dimittis* strongly and briefly, as in exultation. To hear them like that somehow quickened and concentrated his sentimental mood. He recognised with a queer pleasure that he was being enveloped mentally, just as he used to be in younger days, by an influence that was as much a part of the whole thing as the heady warmth. He remembered how in old days in the rectory pew at home he had made a fine art of abstracting himself from the voice of his

father in the pulpit, and filling sermon-time with his own affairs, real or unreal. To-night he found himself, when the sermon began, almost as happy as he used to be in those days, almost as free to lean back, and go wool-gathering. The wool now hung mostly about the alabaster pillars and little kneeling figures, the marble coats-of-arms, the cramped effigies, of dead Mortons. They crowded the church; even to the very western end of the nave they stretched in the plain lettered tablets to younger sons, and daughters whose husbands aspired to this august company. For one soaring monument the church had even had to be altered by the building of a dormer in the roof. Then Ingram's eye fell on a brass tablet in the chancel wall. It was comparatively of modest size, and very plain. Amid some lettering too small for Ingram to read at the distance stood out in large letters "Hugh, tenth Earl of Morton." So that was all that the last lord, rich, elegant, leisured and masterful, had found necessary to record him among his ancestors. The rest of the inscription was so short that obviously it could contain little more than bare names and dates. What would the earlier Mortons have thought of it? Even

in death they had kept up a kind of domination. Costly effigies or elaborate marble structures had left them lording; and even the younger sons and daughters, having nothing but words, had made themselves out lordly of virtue and over-weening in merit. Did the simple brass mean a more subtle lordliness? It might be a lordliness of sheer contempt for all outside, of comfortable withdrawal into superiority; it might be a more genial lordliness of confidence that in a newer order men were still glad to have an Earl of Morton, and it would have been like the old man to leave it at that, lightly edged with his cynicism. Ingram looked again at as much of the congregation as he could see by a mere movement of the eyes. A Sunday evening congregation would never be taken on the face of it by the son of a rectory; it would not imply much devotion either to religion or to the social order. But it might have negative meanings; it might mean an absence of dissatisfaction, an absence of any antagonisms; and, if one attributed most of it to force of habit, that was only to say the same thing in different words. Yet perhaps one could put into it this amount of the positive: it meant an acceptance of a

certain regulation of life, not necessarily a moral regulation, but an order of things that one did; and in a country church this melted off imperceptibly into an order of things that one was; which was perhaps all that Hugh, tenth Earl of Morton, had had in mind. Ingram's wool-gathering rounded to that, as the shuffle of feet accompanied the end of the sermon.

In the few steps afterwards from the church door to the little shaded gateway into the park Ingram found his perception of the scattered groups lingering in the churchyard rather less sentimental. He felt that acceptance of the order was, after all, deeply qualified. The old men made their respectful gestures a little self-consciously; he could almost hear them saying to the newer generations, "Well, you may be right, and the great folk a good deal wrong, but we're too old to change our ways." The middle-aged people made their gestures, too, but the men raised their hats instead of touching them, and the women bowed. In the firm eyes of the farmers he read indeed no resentment, but certainly a very modified acceptance: "Yes, they're nice gentlefolk, but gentlefolk haven't anything to do but be nice, and that's all we have to acknowledge."

Such youths as had lingered looked on awkwardly, and very self-consciously indeed, without a sign or a motion. And the mind that reflected all this self-consciousness became instantly aware of its own. Was there, in fact, any other reason for its taking the reflection? The very process which had destroyed naturalness on the one side was the cause of its absence in him, however much upbringing and manners might enable him to conceal the lack. As the three of them from the castle walked silently back, Ingram thought of the days when his walk after evening service was only to the rectory, of the words exchanged with farmers and their wives, the talk of a minute or two with the regular group made by the organist (who kept the village shop), the schoolmaster and the miller; and, thinking of the people he used to speak to, he remembered the quite natural omission of others, the formless lads and young men of whom he had been conscious to-night. The omission became more than a negative thing; it had definite content; for it meant that he had been in a place, in an order. From one's own place one saw what was natural to see, and left out what was natural to leave out; one's face was in a direction. And

if one's face was in a direction, one's back was to something. So by the time they reached the drawbridge Ingram was again in his familiar bewilderment: what had he got behind him? But everyone after the roaming, detached hours of the Sunday was so glad to see everyone else at supper that he only caught sight of his problem to drop it readily.

X

NEARLY the whole morning of the next day the men of the party were at the river, sitting and talking in the boat-house, and being taken out in pairs. A mild but definite air of business had settled down as early as breakfast-time, when from the windows the boatman could be seen pottering about a four upturned on trestles, her varnish sparkling in the sun, and a group of men putting up a tent near the boat-house. Luncheon was a rather silent meal, at which only Nicholson and a New College youth in equally good training felt easy enough to talk. But the castle was well accustomed to these accesses of rowing "fidgets"; and not even the newest of its footmen would have offered the coffee-tray to the men in flannels. In the afternoon visitors arrived constantly, and the waterside began to look like a little Henley.

A big, brown man, flinging his heavy coat into his motor, hailed Cerney, whom he saw coming down from the house.

"Hullo!" Cerney said, "How are you, Middleton? How d'ye do, Mrs Middleton? Jolly of you to come."

"You look beastly fit," the big man said. "Lucky chap! you've still got time to row."

"So would you have, you old slacker, if you'd get rid of that motor."

"Not I. Family cares now. My place takes some running, if the boy's to have anything, and you've only got your politics to think of. No; old laurels for me now. Can I have a tub of sorts, if I ask the boatman? Come on, Mary."

Cerney was left to walk towards the river with a new arrival, Miss Brooke, daughter of a squire whose great lands marched with the Morton acres. She had known these river parties since the time when they had occasionally lasted a fortnight, and filled for her sporting soul the gap before cricket had fairly begun.

"What's the programme to-day, Lord Cerney?" she asked.

He gave it briefly: two real races, one between the two fours that he had made up, and a pair race in which he and another man

were taking a small handicap from Nicholson and the New College youth; and, for the rest, some "rag" races, invented by the house-party's good spirits and ingenuity.

"Wish we had Jim here!" he added.

"Poor Jim!" she replied; "not much of light boats for him in Simla."

Cerney waved a hand as he started at a trot for the boat-house. On the balcony of it were a few men, who used to row here, talking to the crews; and Lord Morton, with two or three of the older men, was contemplating the oars propped against the boat-house door, and discussing box-looms and girder-looms. On the grass before the tent women were strolling to and fro, and a slight clatter of tea came from the tent. Four men in shorts and zephyrs came down from the boat-house balcony, and, taking their oars, walked to the water's edge, where their four was already lying.

"Who's that man, getting in behind Mr Nicholson?" one of the strolling ladies asked of Charlie Morton, Cerney's youngest brother.

"Oh, that's Ingram, a friend of Matcham's. He's an under-secretary of sorts."

"He looks nervous."

“So should I be, if I were rowing two behind Nicholson, and hadn’t rowed much for years. Sorry, Lady North, my crew now.”

She smiled and nodded, and watched the first crew paddling past to the start. The other, which Cerney was stroking, carried out its boat, and also watched its rivals for a minute before turning back for the oars. The men left on the balcony leaned on the railing meditatively, recalling the happy moments, which never lose their fascination for rowing men, of the paddle down to the start, the first stretching of muscles on the smooth, unlashd water. Lord Morton went over towards the tent, and moved about among his guests. A few men had started to walk down the bank, which was dotted with groups of spectators—house servants, estate servants, tenant farmers and cottagers.

The start was well in sight from the boat-house, three quarters of a mile down a straight reach, and the crews were watched, as they swung round to their stake-boats. You could even see the turn of a head now and then, and recognise signs of the gloomy nervousness which will to the end of time beset men in light boats waiting for a start. And if you could

not hear the word given from the bank, you could see the oar-blades lash into the water, and already hear faintly the thump of the looms in the riggers and the roar of slides coming up. To the crews themselves the sounds had the familiar old effects. For some seconds there was nothing in the world but trying to be with stroke in the first quick half-dozen, and to know exactly how he was going to lengthen out. Then there was such consciousness as rowing habit gave to each man. Some have to say profane words over and over again; Matcham always had in his head a few bars of a silly song of his youth, forgotten at other times; Ingram counted mechanically, never getting very far before he began again at one. He could feel, as he got his second wind after the first acute misery, that he was not enough in training to row himself out. He could only pound on, hoping to keep his swing, and praying for the sound of a voice from the bank that would mean nearing the finish. It came at last in a shout from the old lord to Cerney, who had a canvas's lead, and by the help of his own big back and Matcham's lifted his boat home half-a-length in front.

Ingram found it pleasant after this to play honoured middle age for a while, and drop with a groan into a chair.

"Like the first day with hounds after years abroad, eh?" said a thin, white-moustached man near him. "Anyhow, you must have a good heart."

"I bet you're as fit as any of us, General," said another man.

"Had need be," was the answer, "if I'm going to keep my temper in all your racket nowadays."

The Tory member for one of the county constituencies strolled up with his wife, and said :

"How do, Ingram? Do you think the Liberal Government pulls its weight here, General?" He turned to his wife: "Let me introduce Mr Ingram to you, my dear. You don't know him, I think, though you know what hay he makes of my innocent questions in the House. If I wanted revenge I'd snapshot him now, and placard his constituency with it—wasting his time in sport."

"Oh, after all," Mrs Mainprice said, "he might play golf with no harm done, so I don't see why he shouldn't row."

"I don't think I care, anyway," Ingram chimed in. "I feel as if I should just say that I did it because I chose to."

"Best way, too," said Mainprice. "You fellows let your constituents get too uppish, and then ours catch the infection."

Laughter from the river-side path told that the first "rag" race was on. Four of the men who had not yet rowed were out in a couple of pairs for an inverted bumping race. They had started five yards apart, and the front boat was to try to be bumped by the other, neither pair being allowed to "easy" entirely. It was a glorious crawl of fifty yards, full of perilous lurches; and if the rowing men alone could fully appreciate the fun—and the skill—of the creeping progress, there was roar enough of laughter when the pair behind upset picturesquely opposite the tent, because bow, in a frantic endeavour to avoid making the bump, had backed water suddenly in the middle of coming forward. Afterwards four other men were ready for a tug of war in tub-pairs tied together by the rudder-lines; and the end of this was that one pair fell into such consuming laughter at the sight of the other that they were towed disgracefully back-

wards for a hundred yards looking like men riding a donkey with their faces to the tail.

“Oh, Lord Cerney,” cried a well-preserved but rather hard-looking lady, “do give me a minute. Our boy is in for the Senior Sculls at Eton, and my husband has been asking Lord Morton if your boatman may coach him, and Lord Morton says the river’s your affair. Do give us permission.”

“Why, of course,” Cerney answered. “Where’s your boy? I’ll take him to Ted, and we’ll fix it up.”

He walked off, reflecting with some amusement that his father’s reference to him had been a rather neat shunting of this Mrs Bellson. She could be charming, but she was a little too anxious to get on, and Cerney was sorry for the boy whose very rowing was being made to serve the purpose.

It was in a lovely evening light that the serious pairs paddled down to the start for their serious race. They were the four best oars of the lot; and the whole party of people, who had been changing partners sociably over the tea and the funny races, the men dropping into talk of local affairs, mutual commiserations

on the state of taxation, and matters of the Bench or the Hunt, while the women talked gossip of the season—the whole party now unconsciously drifted back to the earlier divisions. The men, still perhaps deep in their discussions, had nevertheless an absent-minded air, as they gathered nearer the boat-house, or walked down the bank ; the rowing set clustered on the balcony ; the women more frankly turned their backs to the river. It lay just ruffled by a breeze, the lively yet smooth water perfect for rowing. The shadows of great trees were invading it on one side, but the pairs were well out in the sunshine, before they reached the the start ; and the white figures and the sparkle of the oars were so sharply bright that they seemed to make even the colour of the water more brilliant. Perhaps some of the men's absent-mindedness came from the vision of the light spidery forms far down by the two gay white piles at the start ; it brought back sentimental evenings of their youth, flirtations in punts, and the blissful stillness of a softly paddled "Canader" when the fireworks began.

Matcham had walked away down the bank with Lady Rose. Ingram, stretching creaking

joints, and feeling that life was not so discontinuous, after all, if one could still make oneself thoroughly stiff, had been "ragging" with the little gang of undergraduates. Then their young muscles sent them flying off to run up with the pairs, and cheer Nicholson and his man to a reversal of Cerney's victory in the fours. They were still laughing round the boat-house when Ingram, leaving the general break-up of the day's visitors, wandered off by himself to the garden. And when the dressing bell roused him, an hour later, he was amazed to find how far his mind had strayed into memories of the past.

XI

THESE memories were still strong when he was back in town, and going to pay his next call on the Richardsons he felt his long association with them freshened, and renewed in its ties. Irene laughed at him, as he came in, and asked why he had taken to walking like a cavalry officer. He explained the strange lifting of his legs, and, when she had teased him a little about his sudden throw-back to rowing, which had no reputation as a politician's pastime, he had to tell her all about his days at Castle Morton. He even confessed to his sentimental memories, pleading as his excuse that he had never played so much since the old days at Burlands.

"I wonder sometimes," Irene said, "whether I've done anything since those days."

Ingram saw in her then the quality that had so long been her charm, the curious air that he could only describe to himself as a braced softness, a susceptible disillusionment. He could recall men who had obviously felt the one side

of her; and he had suspected that sooner or later the other side had surprised them. What had sometimes puzzled him was that a girl who gave so little sense of cynicism, and yet such wayward touches of fineness, should have kept her head enough to administer those surprises. But he was not turning over all these things now. It was enough that he caught the flicker of the old mood, and they were deep in remembering this and that, picnics among Hampshire pines, cricket weeks that had been locally famous. At the end Ingram said:

“Oh, dear! It makes me wonder whether any of us have done anything since then. We’ve certainly done nothing at such a pace.”

“You had less weight to carry then, you know.”

“True: but I think it was also that we had something to ride. We rode our elders, sat in their saddles, made them do all the carrying.”

“Oh, well, you at least might be thought to have something still to ride—your constituents, or the Treasury Bench, or something.”

“No, no. One’s constituents do the whipping now. All one rides is hobbies; and, you

know, riding hobbies is only using one's own legs."

"You don't greatly strike me as needing a lift. You're getting on very nicely."

"Yes, I expect I'm just grumbling. But if it comes to that, who began it? A young woman who says she's done nothing for years, when she does every year all the pleasant things rich people do."

"You've left a word out. Every year all the same things. But I'm not really discontented. There are still a lot of good times, but times when one just sits back are dull."

"Perhaps because people like us have really nothing to sit on," Ingram answered, smiling. "I leave you that for meditation. Good-bye."

As he walked across the park to Westminster he felt that his parting remark went to the roots. What could one have to sit on—or to ride, if he were to go back to his earlier images—except a mode of life, an ordering of one's house of existence. And the bother was that one belonged to a set which equally hated buying such things wholesale from the Maples of life, and picking up bargains by too self-conscious degrees. Graciousness, ease, seemed to belong so much to having such

things, but still more to not knowing one had them. And how could you not know, if you had begun by wanting them; and how could you help wanting them? Ingram twisted himself round to thinking that what one really had to do was to buy the commonplace mahogany of one's rectory home, and leave one's descendants to get the graciousness out of it. But he remembered, as he caught sight in the House, when he arrived, of some of the acute young men, his friends, that there was already more than half a movement to collect those very things as "pieces," and perversely admire them.

There was time in the House in those days for casual reflections, for the first and second years of the new Government ran their course cheerfully enough. The Tories made no effort to conceal the depth of their shock. In the House they were weak beyond concealment, and what secretly alarmed them most was that their leader, who had so successfully played in his years of office the game of the light hand, of debonair detachment, of refusal to be "drawn," the game of countering moral accusations by treating them as fuss, and all fuss as vulgar—this leader was made by the new House to

appear a posturer. If your followers are to laugh at your neat rapier-play, the objects of it must jump and storm, or wince and glare. If opponents are big and solid, if some of them are even so dead to the rules of the game as to make small contemptuous laughs, then the wielder of the weapon is apt to be more looked at than his victims, and spectators become aware that his agility leads to odd, and rather silly, attitudes. If in the end he loses his own temper, he presents you the spectacle of a loiterer glowering at a busy man, who, having no time for antics, has shouldered the performer off the pavement. The Tory leader was not quite alone in his predicament. The man who was perhaps the most valued recruit of his party was foolish enough not to see that here was a House with a new tone. He had fought an easy election with a good deal of slashing, had raised laughs on a good many platforms, and he made his maiden speech on the same lines. He was fresher at the game than his leader; and he brought to it a different appearance, a young, well-built figure, and a sharp, brown lawyer's face, instead of elegant, silvery graces; so that he seemed to use the edge as well as the point. His happy party cheered;

the speech was a success. But it damned him. His leader, with all he had behind him, was to recover in due time his ground: but the recruit was to remain a man who took politics at the top of his voice, good for platforms, bound as a mere piece of gratitude for election services to get office, but equally bound to grow sour, as men damned must grow.

Beyond these two the Tories had no figures in the House. Such men of their last Ministry as had survived the election showed on the Opposition Front Bench how second-rate that Ministry, the last of several patchings, had been. They were men who had come to office with none of the drilling of Opposition. The Tories had been in power continuously for ten years, and practically, save for a short and not very vigorous Liberal interval, for twenty. Liberals had complained about their long years in the wilderness, but the Tories might well have felt the evil of long years among the fleshpots. It was, indeed, to appear later on how deeply serviceable Opposition could be, when the man who had been the last Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer, had shown in that office no distinction or grip, and had in his first years of criticising Liberal Budgets fairly driven in the

conviction that he possessed after all no more qualification than that of being the son of his father, came after some more years to be an acute critic, and to have arguable theories on the principles of taxation. But that time was not yet. In these early years he was but one of the ineffectual ghosts of the Opposition Front Bench, among whom the shaggy eyebrows and weather-beaten face of their Chief Whip took on an aspect of slow fury, as if he were at his wits' end with these few tongueless couples of his once fine pack. On the benches behind no one promised much development. The most steady speaker, the soundest debater, was a Scotsman, the only one of them who knew exactly what Tariff Reform meant, and he made it as inhuman as Calvinism, and as stiff in argument as the Shorter Catechism.

Opposite this discouraged remnant—indeed all round it, since the new division of parties made the space of one side of the House quite inadequate—was the great company of the triumphant. If it was rather oppressively triumphant, that came perhaps from the amount of “We told you so” which it had to say. It had for so long been informed that it would not do; that its leader was respect-

able, no doubt, but oh! so dull, and so unattractive to patriotic Englishmen; that its most experienced men were so doctrinaire; that its younger men, who could carry the meetings with them, were demagogues. And now that all of these were on the Treasury Bench, placed there by an overwhelming majority, their followers could hardly be expected to refrain from rubbing in the other side's mistake. The mistake had been sustained, had been even elaborated. There was to have been such difficulty in making a Cabinet that the Liberal ship was to split before it was launched. That mistake came from overcleverness; the respectable old leader, whom the other side scoffed at, could have told them that men do not continue to dwell disaffected in tabernacles when the army is entering the Promised Land; and Lord Rosebery's tabernacle commanded a singularly inextensive prospect—at this time, indeed, little more than that of his Lordship's own rapidly receding back. Then the party, the Tories had said, was to speak with so many divided voices that the leaders, distracted, would not know which to attend to. Here again they were over-clever; because, though the party wanted many things,

and wanted them in differing degrees, yet, speaking roughly, they united in wanting each as it came up. Telling the other side "We told you so" did not lose its savour, and it gave a confident vigour to the public movements of the first years, the big demonstrations in favour of land reform and land taxation, in favour of licensing reform, in favour of labour legislation, and measures for dealing with unemployment.

Demonstrations—for these large measures were not rushed upon the country, as the Tories prophesied, as indeed they continued in the face of facts to assert. Curiously enough the effect of the years in the wilderness acted rather as a check than as a goad. Men came to office, not only having held none, but feeling, as nothing but length of empty time could have made them feel, the interest of office. It was not the least valuable work of that Liberal Government that it set the nation's official houses in order. Stories were told of Departments in which official correspondence was found to be five or six years in arrear. Whether they were true or not, it is certain that this Ministry made very sure of taking up its reins. The Opposition jeered at it for failing to keep promises, for not doing this, and postponing

that. But meanwhile the old man with the big solid head, a head with so much brain-pan that the top seemed almost to overhang his eyes like a cap, smiled and went his way ; the man who was to succeed him, a man with cold eyes that occasionally twinkled, and a mouth that only smiled when his point was beyond argument, made his unperturbed explanations, and took no more notice ; the nervous, quick Welshman asserted that plenty would be done yet ; and the square-shouldered, thick-set man with a close-cropped white beard and a blue suit, who was growing in these years unexpectedly chary of speech, said that at any rate enough would be done to make the other side pretty sick. For the rest, the Cabinet fronted the world with an assurance largely due, no doubt, to the consciousness that, as they stood, they surprised nobody. When once it was clear that the old leader was going to have with him any men he wanted, the chief offices of the Government had gone almost without saying. Of the one appointment which gave surprise at the time this statement remains fundamentally true ; the burden of India was taken by the only shoulders which could so finely lift the weight off colleagues pledged in the main to domestic

reforms. The Exchequer, the Foreign Office, the War Office were departments with which certain names instantly associated themselves, and the only doubt had been whether those names were too firmly written on other rolls. Naturally, when the offices were accepted, there was talk of bargains; the Opposition said that an appearance of unity had been bought at a price which advanced Liberals would soon perceive and regret; many Liberals thought so too. The few people who, as usual, knew everything had their version; it was that the leader, making up his Cabinet, had sent his offers to these men, had given them a decent interval, and had then somewhat peremptorily asked for a definite reply, catching them before they had devised any common line to take; with the result that they had had either to accept or stand out—the latter prospect, with a party just then large and enthusiastic enough not to miss them very much, being singularly blank. What everyone could know was that Lord Rosebery, addressing, as his annual habit was, the League which had been the cause of all this futile speculation, referred very definitely to his three late lieutenants, saying that for reasons unknown to him, but which obviously

seemed to them good, they had taken office. Though he was thought at the time to know more than he chose to say, the later history of the League was such as to suggest that he spoke no less than the truth.

Probably the simplest interpretation of the whole episode would be the truest. There were no bargains, because there was no need for any. The Chancellorship of the Exchequer was so natural a form of nomination to the succession to the Premiership that implicitly it carried all that its holder could want. The War Office had for so long been full of schemes of Army Reform that an almost professional army reformer could be sure without bargaining of getting before long the main measure of a session ; which in due course he did get, taking up a vast amount of time. As for the Foreign Office, it was only necessary to carry on the superstition that foreign affairs were not, and should not be, party affairs. What damaged Liberalism more than it was aware of for some time was less the presence of certain ideas in these offices than an absence of vital ideas. The old lack of relation between what one department was doing and what another was doing remained unaltered. The great Army

Scheme, clever as it was, had plainly been hatched solely on the Army Council's table ; and was seen, when critics had time to look at all sides of it, to be leaving dispositions of troops curiously out of harmony with the state of our foreign relations, and even with our Colonial situation ; nor had it any confessed connection with naval dispositions for defence. In the Foreign Office it was difficult to discern any hand at work but that of the permanent officials ; and the only definite information that any advanced Liberal got out of it was acquired by a distinguished Orientalist with a passion for Eastern peoples. The piece of knowledge he acquired—and did not conceal—was that the supreme personage he saw had chiefly struck him by confusing the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.

But these troubles, after all, were not immediate, or on the surface. There was too much good temper on the Liberal side to allow any quick disappointment ; or perhaps the sustaining force was just sufficiently unstable to be better described as high spirits than as good temper. The encouragement of the General Election had been real, not superficial. The very fact of the exaggerated size of the

majority, which some had regarded as the surest sign of superficiality, was to not a few observers genuinely significant. It did not, indeed, mean that the country had to that extent swung over to Liberal principles; but it did mean that Tory popularity was not the impregnable fact that it had been represented to be. It was something at least to know that the mass of voters whom the Tories had rather boastfully carried in the Khaki election were capable of being tired of that particular colour and cry.

In the main there were new men enough to provide new things. That was, in fine, the upshot of the first two years in the new House. Indeed it was the first flow of this freshness, and not a hostile spirit, that caused the Tory leader's predicament. It was a genuine inability on the part of Liberals to understand his method. The odd thing was that, whereas dispossessed ex-members regarded the keen new men as University debaters, and dismissed their ideas as mere subjects for talk, the new men's criticism on the Tory leader was precisely that he treated the House so much as a debating society. They could not understand why verbal "scores," however neat, should be

regarded as disposing of points ; to them the point remained, however completely the putter of it might be annihilated. As time passed both sides learned wisdom. The Tory leader regained his reputation, because the raw men grew to learn from him that, however obstinately a point may exist, it needs wielding, if it is to operate. And the lesson the other side learned, if less visible in the outer world, was discerned by old hands in such sheltered spots as the library of the Carlton Club, where they found their habitual slumbers disturbed by the rustle of dry pages under the somewhat bewildered hands of their own youngsters.

XII

EARLY in the summer of the second year of office Ingram found himself dressing for dinner one evening with easier anticipations than were usual to him in face of a dinner-party. As he pulled on his gloves he looked again at the note of invitation over his mantelpiece, signed "Rose Matcham," and reflected with amusement how calmly Matcham had appeared to be approaching his first considerable entertainment. He had married Lady Rose in the autumn, having come rather earlier than he had expected into some family money, and they had taken a little house in Kensington Square. It was a charming little place with its fresh white panelling, and it managed to make tininess interesting and amusing. It did so by shaving off rooms into polite little curves, to help you along the hall; by sending its staircase up at such quaint angles that you forgot to notice that it had really, if you analysed it, no space to be anything but corkscrew; by jutting out into

delicious old powder-closets, neat enough in use to leave you unaware that in point of fact the bureau or the Chippendale cupboard which occupied them would elsewhere have been in the way. With a little help, such as might be given by very clear decisions on the part of its mistress as to which doors were to be used, and which not, the small house had all the air of a very clever and very delicate piece of civilisation. Lady Rose's cleverness, Ingram was to remark at once, went far. To be whisked firmly up to the half-landing before the servant offered to take your coat might be discomposing for the moment ; but the point was that, as the quaint staircase had a good half-landing, guests might just as well be kept clear of the greater discomposure of proximity to the traffic between the dining-room and below-stairs. Then again, to be turned sharp at the top of the stairs away from the main door of the drawing-room, and to be introduced at a minor door was a process fully explained when you took in that by this means your hostess was enabled to come forward to you, alone and graciously, down the backwater, leaving her other guests in the main pool, instead of having to reveal to you, by difficulties of her progress,

or even by being obliged to wait helplessly for yours, that the main pool was but a small one.

The guests to-night, at any rate, seemed to be not likely to disappoint the little house's opinion of itself. In the pleasant room with its three high windows, not less delightful because in order to be three at all they had to be very narrow, the few people had assumed very nicely the aspect of a party awaiting dinner in a lordly room. Matcham, over by one of the open windows, was talking to an elderly lady, tall and very slender, whose softly falling robes would have been perilously near the "artistic" if they had not been composed of fold upon fold of exquisite lace. Ingram knew her for Mrs Grahamstown, wife of a somewhat exalted official of one of the great museums, and perceived the variegation of the Morton connection beginning to expand about his friend. Grahams-town himself Ingram did not know, but, as he surrendered Lady Rose to her advance upon a new-comer, he made him out as a business-like man who was talking to young Cowdray—that is, he marked Grahamstown as business-like until he saw his eyes, wherein the reservation of judgment habitual to a man dealing always

with offered treasures that may or may not be what they profess to be, took on by the neighbourhood of the precise chin and the commonplace moustache an undue appearance of indecision and vagueness. The rest of the party Ingram knew—a sister of Matcham, one of the junior whips with his wife, and Mrs Peter Croft, a novelist of some repute, whose habitual good-natured contempt was for the first time beginning to fit her, since she had allied herself with the militant suffragists.

Ingram took down Mrs Grahamstown, who was full of enthusiasm for the pretty house. She had a pretty house of her own, but it was in Greenwich, which was rather far away, even for the sake of getting the particular charm of the old bow-fronted villas, and little terraces of houses with pillars and verandahs, that seemed all modelled on the stern-galleries of old three-deckers. What really disappointed her, she frankly confessed, was that they had failed to lead a new housing movement there.

“You see,” she said, “there are quite regular movements. There’s the Hampstead movement, a composite one of artists of the Seces-

sion, vegetarians, and Radicals. There's the Kensington movement of rich people who keep the William Morris shop going. There's the Bloomsbury movement of writers and sociological politicians—you'll live there, Mr Ingram. And our idea was that we might have a Greenwich movement of permanent officials. I call it the Greenwich movement, but all about there, in Blackheath and Lewisham (don't shrug your shoulders), and even in Deptford there are jolly old Early Victorian and Georgian houses, with garden walls, and little green doors, and trees, and lawns. Restful and behind the times when you get there, dull and unattractive on the way to them. Exactly the houses to express the quality of superior jobs in Government offices, don't you think?"

Ingram laughed. "Oh, the County Council trams are worrying out the way to them, aren't they?"

"The houses or the jobs? I suppose you mean both, but after all the little green doors are not yet gone, even with your competition."

"Well, as long as they let in people who appreciate lawns, we may as well keep them.

I'll write letters to the papers when the next tram route wants to cut them up."

"I don't quite know how allusive you're being, but if you think the museum a lawn you'd better talk to William. He'll tell you it's a jungle."

"Full of hostile officials potting at one another down corridors, I suppose? Anyhow their weapons are not very deadly, and they still combine against the explorer, like other savage races."

"Poor Mr Ingram! You sound as if someone had been putting you on a Departmental Committee of Inquiry. Or else you've been filling up forms to get a loan collection for your constituents."

"No, to be perfectly honest, I'm merely talking through my hat. I never met a museum official who wasn't charming to me. But I'm not sure that they oughtn't all to live in a museum, like dons in college. Dons' objections to one another, you know, would be awful, if it weren't that from the life together the quarrels get heated to a point at which they become either epic or comic—in any case become a work of art, a labour of scholarship to keep up. Museum officials

ought to be able to do the same, don't you think?"

"Well, you'll help my movement," Mrs Grahamstown said, "if you'll throw a few Greenwich terraces into a quadrangle."

She turned to Matcham, and Ingram on his other side dropped into a discussion of National Theatre projects, which was flickering about Lady Rose's end of the table. Cowdray was maintaining that the project was sound, as long as it stuck firmly to the production of absolutely solemn plays. Miss Matcham said you couldn't bore people in a theatre nowadays.

"I quite agree," said Cowdray, "but not quite with what you mean. It's true that you can't bore them, do what you will, as long as you're solemn. Have you ever seen the audiences at Tree's theatre reading the platitudinous little books he distributes with the programmes when he produces Shakespeare or the musical Phillips? Well, if they don't bore the public, no solemnities could."

Ingram smiled, as his other ear caught across the table echoes of Grahamstown explaining to Mrs Peter Croft why there were no women on the permanent staff of the museums; and

Cowdray, equally conscious of what was going on there, and scenting a move to the subject of women inspectors of schools, became feverishly brilliant about theatres. But Mrs Croft had before long dragged in the Junior Whip, and the conversation was bound to filter round through Lady Rose to the other side of the table. Ingram, comfortably ensconced between Mrs Grahamstown and Miss Matcham, kept the penetrating subject at bay. Matcham and the Junior Whip's wife, he was aware, after having kept off politics with all due regard for the amenities of civilised life, had finally plunged into them, and Mr Grahamstown, flustered by Mrs Croft's attacks, was joining in desperately.

When the men were left alone, Ingram saw the Junior Whip coming round the table to sit by him, and greeted him with :

"Are you putting yourself on the door, so to speak? Is there a division to-night? I forget."

The Whip was a grave little man, who understood such jokes, which was fortunate, since they were the only kind ever made to him. He answered :

"Oh, no hurry. A taxi will take the three of

us in twenty minutes. All the same, I am more or less on duty just at this moment."

"And all for me? What's up?"

Herbertson looked round for a few seconds. He wished to make the talk appear so casual that the others would go on with their own affairs. The cigarettes were going round, and in the mild distraction of the process he continued:

"We're half expecting a bye-election or two. It wouldn't be a bad thing if we had some platform speaking to remind people. They get off politics at this time of year. We've rather a good chance in the north—local federations' annual meetings—and I wanted to book you for a speech or two."

Ingram was ready to welcome the suggestion. A man may be nervous, self-conscious, may have all the qualities that would be likely to make electioneering a torture; but, if he has once been in it, he likes going back to it. The session so far had been good enough, but not exciting, and he liked the idea of a run to the north.

"You'd tell me, before I go, what you want said?"

"Oh, there's nothing much we want said;

it's more a time of things we want talked about : Unemployment, Free Trade Budgets, Old Age Pensions, inquiries into foreign insurance systems, and especially the land. We want to know how the north feels about that. Oh, and I suppose you'd better say something on Army Reform. On second thoughts, though, perhaps better not. Volunteering up there is so good that, if we're going to say anything, we'd better do it by itself, in front-rank style. And, by the way, be careful about labour legislation ; that's ticklish ground in Lancashire ; you'd better leave it to their own men."

Ingram nodded. Lancashire and Yorkshire labour members and employer members alike had long ago struck him as people who made a preserve of their problems, and gave no encouragement to poachers.

XIII

A WEEK later he landed in the early evening in the huge northern town. He had been there before, and recognised the approach to it. He watched the long-backed, rather forbidding limestone hills give place to curiously desolate spaces, wondering again what made them so desolate, and finding a reason in the lonely aspect of the trees, which were few, and were visible across long distances, in which also appeared ragged advances of building and a tall chimney or two. Coming by the route he had chosen he avoided the Staffordshire coal-mines, and the manufacturing towns which from the south lead blackly and smokily to the great city. But he had an approach no less significant past the hill-sides scarred with lime-burning and quarrying for interminable building, and in the plain, which stares vacantly at the monster crouched on its edge, and paralysing it into market-garden immobility.

There had been sunshine on the hills, and in

the young green of the woods about them. But, when the train dropped at last into the big gutter that carries the rail through the suburbs, the sky was grey, and the house-roofs and the station platforms were wet, though it was difficult to see any rain falling. The train whistled itself through the small stations, shot out into wide net-works of rails, and then almost suddenly ran into the gloom of the terminus. It was altogether an arrival that struck a Londoner as peculiarly devoid of fuss. There was none of the vast turning out of luggage which keeps a London platform busy. In less than a minute, it seemed to Ingram, the whole net product of the long, swift, efficient journey was a file of men, with hardly any women among them, disappearing down the platform with their luggage in their hands, one man climbing into a hansom, a couple of guards looking at the train as if they thought it all not worth doing. Against the patches of light made by the exits at the foot of the high arch of the roof there was a perpetual to-and-fro of silhouetted figures, who hardly succeeded in making much collective noise. Ingram felt lonely, but a little adventurous, released, at least, from the familiar.

Taken in charge by a representative of the Liberal Federation Committee, who hurried up with apologies, Ingram walked over to his hotel, and kept the representative to tea with him, extracting odd items of information about the night's meeting, and the annual conferences of the Committee. Then he was free to escape into the streets. He had not to stroll far before he began to enjoy himself. True, rain was unmistakably falling now, and in the gloom of it the lamps were being lighted. But he caught a distinct note in the place, and it stirred him. It was the loud methodical ring of the gongs on the great trams. They rolled, halted, rolled again a few yards, beating the gongs, swinging into line, gathering a fresh tram here and there at a corner. People made dashes to board them, and an impassive driver beat his gong once or twice, and slid the monster forward. As Ingram walked, he became aware of another note, a peculiarly heavy slow clank of horse-hoofs, and he understood that what had taken his ear was the difference in tone between this traffic and London traffic. London sounds were both more monotonous and more varied. The main complex there was more steady and more solid, but its elements were all more rapid, more flowing—

the multiple pattering beat of motors, the roar of quickly driven vans, the bells and rhythmical clatter of the hansom horses. Here there were only the rolling and gongs of the trams, and the slow clap-clap of the big horses drawing the long, flat, laden lorries of the cotton warehouses. He came to a corner where three streets met at the mouth of a fourth, which looked like a gulf. The gongs became exciting, for obviously this was one of the ways out to the suburbs. Their beat quickened, and became a cheerful peal. Tram after tram, free at last of its careful halts, plunged away with a rising note from its wheels, the last passengers clambering up the stairs, and a general relieved sense of closed offices spreading over the whole bustling corner. Ingram almost felt as if the policemen on point duty everywhere must have just taken up from one another the cry, "Who goes home?" as they do at Westminster, when the House rises.

Gathering thus a feeling of exhilaration, at which a native would have scoffed, he took the night's meeting in great good spirits, and did very well. He felt himself tired after the journey and the speech, and excused himself from a supper at the Liberal Club. Yet he had hardly

hoisted his umbrella in the street before a man, standing by the wall of the building he had left, said in the raised intonations of a northern voice :

“ You did very well, Mr Ingram. I enjoyed it.”

He recognised the simple assertive habit of the north, as well as the tones, but, though he stopped and looked, he did not quickly recognise the face. Its owner went on :

“ Wray’s my name. You’d hardly remember me, but I knew you when I was at Ruskin Hall.”

Ingram remembered him at once, and was particularly anxious to cover his forgetfulness. He recalled the man’s absolute and unshaken soundness, his quite appallingly logical mind, the awkward rigidity with which he confronted anything in the work of the Hall which had compromise in it. He recalled the impossibility alike of dissuading and of agreeing with Wray when a point of principle arose, and he seemed to see in retrospect that Wray’s mere neighbourhood had had the faculty of making them arise. He had liked him, and had been of the opinion that this northerner would be the salt of any association he had with his fellows, but be very

little salted himself. Meeting him again in this black rain, Ingram forgot his tiredness, and fell into step beside him. They talked for a time of the meeting, of the people and the classes that it had represented; and as they talked they passed from streets where the darkness was due to the great cliff-like warehouses which overhung them into streets of a different kind of darkness, due solely to less effective lamps. They were in a belt of habitations strange to Ingram's eye, because they were so low. Before them was the long vista of a main road, yet at this point there was hardly a building on it more than two storeys high. From either side short streets led off with a deadly rectangular regularity, and they too were made up of unbroken rows of these squat structures. The nearest things to them in London, that Ingram could recall, were certain streets in Islington, Lambeth, and Camberwell; and he supposed that these had a similar origin, the increase of the number of clerks, as commerce and manufactures grew, and the feeble supplying of their housing needs, always on the basis of the immediate demand alone. Looking about him thus, he asked in some depression :

“Is it out this way that you live?”

Wray had no love for the district, but he detected the meaning of the tone, and was inclined to be argumentative. However, he answered quietly enough :

“ Yes, I do live out this way. But I wasn’t going home just at present. There’s a small club up here which I generally go to of an evening.” Then he added, on an impulse of memory of old talks with Ingram, “ Would you care to come in for a bit ? ”

Ingram thanked him, and accepted; and they fell back on casual matters, turning presently into one of the melancholy side streets. It showed one considerable patch of yellow-white light in it, falling from a large window, which had plainly served once as the shop-front of some sweet-seller or newsagent ; and it looked sordid, with two-thirds of the glass made opaque by orange-coloured paint, the upper third being nearly as opaque from sootiness and rain-marks. Inside, a couple of incandescent gas burners shone bitterly over a few wooden tables with metal ashtrays and crumpled newspapers upon them, and some wooden arm-chairs, three or four of which were occupied. A mud-coloured linoleum was on the floor. Wray looked round, and nodded. He said to his guest :

“This isn’t really a club, so I can’t offer you real drinks, I’m afraid. Will you have some coffee or some cocoa? I can get you either.”

In the next few minutes Ingram felt a curious air of defiant reserve threatening to settle down on the room. He had been often enough in workmen’s clubs to recognise its nature, and leave it alone; if it did not dissolve of itself, it could not be made to. He had to trust to Wray. The danger passed; but it left something to which his experience gave him no parallel, something which was neither the easy, almost friendly, hostility nor the cut-and-dried Vorwaerts obstinacy of democrats of the south. The tone here was as arrogant, perhaps more arrogant; and yet at times the philosophy struck him as almost Quietist. The men were all, he could see, of Wray’s quality; they had read much, they had minds so habituated to questioning, and so little to taking anything on trust, that they sometimes seemed childish in their insistence on each step of a conversation. But they were vital minds; and, if they had much of the old contempt for the shibboleths of rich people, they had a contempt as great and much fresher for the shibboleths of their own people. The

talk came round to the subject of local Labour members, and Ingram noticed with pleasure that he was not in for any of the hot-headed, red-democrat abuse of the Labour party which he would almost certainly have heard in any similar company in London.

“They’re not free enough,” one of the group was saying to him. “They’re tied on the one side by some more or less local Trades Union, and on the other by the constitution of the Labour party. They’re just delegates; it’s not in their hands to govern.”

Ingram said: “Surely you’re going too far. A great deal of the legislation they want would be forcible control of some of their own people.”

“Wait,” was the reply. “Wait till they get a Bill like their Mines Eight Hours Bill, and see how much governing they can put through. Or watch them on the half-time question.”

Ingram, wanting to probe in a new direction, turned the subject, and asked:

“I wonder if any of you could clear up a small mystery for me. I met a man not long ago in a train, who interested me very much. He wouldn’t tell me his name, but he was

clearly a foreigner, and I should say, from the people he spoke of and the places he knew, a great socialist. A short, bearded man, with one eyebrow very much pushed down by a scar just above it. It marks him so much that, if any of you have seen him, you'd remember him. He seemed to spend most of his life travelling over Europe."

There was a short silence, in which no one showed any signs of recognising this description. When an answer did come at last it disconcerted Ingram. Wray said :

"Doesn't look as if any of us knows him individually, but I should say all of us know him typically. He's one of the Internationalist crowd, no doubt, who think they can do marvels by getting the workers of different countries to agree to do things together. We don't much believe in that nowadays; and here, where the army isn't conscript, they haven't much chance for the best side of their work. If we ever do get conscription here, they'll be able to make a kind of fellow-feeling here for other soldiers, as they are making now between French and Germans. That's always one's private amusement, when Jingoës talk about conscription. But, after all, it works

out to the same thing. Tories say they want a big army to guarantee peace. They'd get one by conscription with which they couldn't guarantee war. So it's all the same."

In the rest of the talk Ingram heard this last phrase so often that it seemed a kind of motto. But, when he recalled his first impression of it as almost Quietist philosophy, he saw that he was wrong. It was much rather a belief that so much was now leavening the thought of the world that in time there would come to be hardly any measure which its opponents would not call socialist; and hardly any to which its authors, however much surprised by the truth, would be able to deny that description.

"Well," Ingram said at the end, "I don't suppose names matter much, as long as the work is done."

"It's the people we are still wanting. The few we've got we have to push too much. I don't mean our particular members; I mean the men in the bigger parties, the House at large, because they're in the end the people who have to do things."

"I see. You want a new House, paid members, shortened debates, and so on."

The man who was answering him looked half through him a moment. Then he said :

“No. Paid members are either handcuffed members or drugged members. And it’s no good shortening debates, if men use even five or ten minutes to talk bosh. I’ll tell you when you’ll get your new House : when free education has gone on long enough and well enough to teach the working man how to do several things at once. Then he’ll take Parliament in his stride.”

“But,” said Ingram, getting up and feeling now tired enough to launch a sententious remark, “will he then be a working man ?”

“I don’t know,” was the answer, “but he will be a democrat.”

XIV

INGRAM had another meeting to address in the neighbourhood ; but he was not allowed to spend more than one night at his hotel. For the next he was to be the guest of a local politician, a man of an old business family of the city, who had not migrated to the neighbouring hill counties, but lived still in one of the traditional suburbs. The journey to it gave Ingram some new reflections. He had taken a tram, having already perceived that to use a cab was something like an implication that you did not feel at home in the place, and was apt therefore to distress a hospitable population. The rationale of cabs here he felt he could not hope to understand yet. Cabs there certainly were, so presumably people had need of them ; but perhaps only for hasty business purposes, or for station use. It was, at any rate, too marked for his taste to take one out to the suburbs. So his tram rolled him past the busy corner where he had stood the evening before, and dipped into a gloomy

hollow to cross a black river, which could be seen to steam at the foot of dingy blank walls penetrated by the coughing of engines. The wisps rising wearily from the surface of the prisoned water gave a melancholy sense that in this masterful hive of work even the water could not be its own cool self; it was not even enough that it should be dirty; it must sweat as well. There ensued a region which to a London eye looked like unmitigated back-views. The tram route appeared to have ripped open mercilessly a snug pocket of comfortable squalor; and the squalor, unabashed, had decided after the first shock that if the trams had chosen to come that way they must make the best of it. The effect was partly due to the odd angles at which the blocks of building stood to the road. Rows of two-storey houses sidled down at a slant; a new red public-house, already tanned by soot, planted itself like an obstinate bullock, with one corner thrust forward, facing all ways at once; and rank little cottages, hardly more than rubbish-heaps of posters plastered all over the walls, staggered about in the crevices of the jumble. But within a few hundred yards the scene recovered itself. Orderly rows of villas flanking the road grati-

fied the eye by acknowledging in the names on their gateposts the period to which their dingy stucco and uninteresting window-sashes assigned them. Here and there, as the tram advanced, Ingram saw houses of a more dignified kind, low and long in the roof, spacious in a rather rambling way, and surrounded by blackened gardens. They were frequently untenanted, blankly dreary; and he thought how this marked a distinction between all other towns and London. Surely these must be houses of some family tradition, houses of a solid, respectable worth; but the trams had come roaring by, the flat little terraces had crowded to the old gates, and the family had gone. This meant two things. In London space like that would have been reoccupied at once; the quiet walls and the blackened garden would have disappeared under a soaring pile of flats. But in London the old dwelling would not have been left so easily. Houses like that must mean, in this town of real, if shorter, traditions, something of what Chesterfield House or Devonshire House meant in London; and owners did not abandon these because motor buses rattled the polished old windows, and busy cab routes ran

past their gates. Traditions here were evidently to be of a different kind. At the back of this abandoning must be a deeper alienation from the soil than even a Londoner's. The industrial north in its swiftly grown cities had forgotten the land more completely than monstrous London, in which you could walk for twelve or fourteen miles in a straight line without ever putting your foot on earth. This place was already living for one generation; it had already made the surrender of thinking conditions immortal and man mortal, and retreating from conditions.

However, he was to find himself at last in a house where the surrender had not been made. The uncompromising succession of new semi-detached villas with business-like tiled paths and small iron gates of lumpy spikes was broken by a pair of square plastered pillars, between which a wide carriage-gate opened on to a gravel drive, blackish, and compressed into that sodden, rammed consistency which town gravel acquires. A faint, sickly green hue was given by a discouraged moss creeping about in corners which the sun could not reach. The door-bell clanged ponderously, as if in a vacuum; the hall in a deeply subdued light

offered a soundless welcome; and then all these low-keyed impressions vanished in the abounding kindness of Mr and Mrs Langtoft. For the next hour his impressions were mainly that he had never been with people who were so obviously more interested in their guest than in themselves; that he had never been in a house where a huge photogravure was hung so innocently in a room that contained, and had taste enough to bear, several excellent water-colours; and that he had never known an epigram carry so short a distance in a political talk.

He was to think, as he went to bed that night, that he had not borne a guest's part in the conversation of the dinner-party given in his honour. In fact he had been so much absorbed in listening that hardly anything less than a direct question could draw him in. His mind had shrunk a little at first before the blast of vigour and energy which the conversation seemed to let loose; and he had almost longed for some provokingly casual young man, of the kind that no London dinner-party lacked, to baffle by a few irritating words of youthful boredom this torrent of high-hearted conviction. He had quailed a little also before the publicity of his

situation. In the London welter there would always be someone at a dinner-party to whom a minor member of the Government would be unknown ; someone to whom even a Cabinet Minister would be of no particular interest. There would always be someone either so engrossed in queer remote hobbies of his own, or so blandly detached and lazy, that a guest of the evening would keep a chastened spirit. But here was no pretence of not being interested ; and it was upon Ingram that the blasts of energy impinged. What had in the end done most to brace him to stand up to them was the temptation to see if this vigour was not itself tainted with "pose," was not partly a "showing off," an intimation to the Londoner that he was to see the famous northern downrightness, and never to forget it. Or there might be a more subtle flaw. The London cynicism was often, Ingram knew, mere cover for a kind of mental laziness. The men who used it would not like to confess that they had not grasped political minutiae ; it maintained their conceit better to take the attitude of having dismissed politics as futile ; or in the case of any particular subject to talk airily of some absurdly high-handed but neat way out. Was it not possible

that downrightness could equally be used as cover? The incisive democratic solution of any question might be as impenetrably final as a debonair dismissal of it; and might also conceal an equal inability to disentangle the problem.

As far as politics were concerned, Ingram could not soothe his mind in this way. The downrightness was genuine and vital. The test of it was that it did not merely cut into politics at any angle which suited the speaker, as London cynicism did. If it appeared at any given moment to ignore some midway difficulty, that was only, you learned immediately, because the midway point was due to some lack of downrightness in another direction. The philosophy hung together. But conversation went abroad in time to the arts and to life, and Ingram found himself here more able to appraise at his ease the temper around him. Downrightness began to show its weak spots, and enlightenment was a quality that had been swallowed whole. The results were curious. In music and in painting the dose had been taken long enough. The wholesale movement which had Pre-Raphaelited the town hall walls had swung nearer equilibrium

in a municipal art gallery, which was courageous and alert. The famous concerts were free of any preening eclecticism. Yet the manner of the enlightenment remained traceable in a touchiness towards the critic, a habit of presenting a solid front, which suggested a lack of mellowness. Ingram thought that he could trace it also in a certain languidness of attitude towards these arts, discernible under professed devotion. Drama was now the art to be swallowed, and at a dinner-party like this the process was in full view. Dreary plays were highly esteemed, because their authors forced the pace against the Censor. Shaw's double-jointed negatives completely passed muster, and Galsworthy was pitched into the scale of humanitarianism-at-any-price, with a confidence which would have surprised him. Young local dramatists who could see the piquant contrast between youth and the slow weight of the traditions of a middle-class home were acclaimed for throwing over the traditions. Nor was anything unmeet for the stage, if it passed the standard of seriousness, nor was anything too superficial, if it were fundamental in intention. Appreciation, in fact, whether of drama or of painting, had to Ingram

the appearance of proceeding by leaps across a morass of unexplored mental processes. By some means or other sound tufts had been indicated, and these northerners landed on them solidly and unquestioningly. The more advanced the tuft, the more unquestioning was the young man who landed on it. Those who put their hands to ploughs here certainly never looked back. But to a Londoner there was a lack of flexibility in their attitude, which suggested that it was not a bold spirit, but a cricked neck, which kept their heads in one direction.

It was a life, Ingram began to feel, of categories, a life without antennæ. It responded to nothing; it absorbed much; it reproduced little. It had invented the gas engine, and typified itself; it had wanted something other than the old process of slowly generated heat turning cold lucidity into driving force. These earnest plays, these searing modern books, came down upon minds which knew nothing between a flaw and its remedy; so that a theory had only to present itself as a remedy, and a description had only to portray a flaw, to be received gladly. And yet, Ingram reminded himself, it was this life that had put

the modern face upon England. In the propagation of the manufacturer's politics the middle-class in the south had advanced from its wealthy but citizen villas at Clapham to the merely expensive but *affairé* region of Hyde Park Terrace and Grosvenor Square. And behind that first advance had come the more general invasion of the world of affairs, the invasion that had filled the Government offices with sons of the middle-class, instead of sprigs of aristocracy, and had, less directly, placed Ingram himself and Matcham and their kind at Westminster. Why then should he feel the air here so alien? He was almost driven back upon the form of explanation which, though final, is seldom convincing: the merely geographical explanation. When it first swept down upon London the onset of the manufacturer's politics had not been a proselytising movement. The unbending, wealthy, sincere men of the thirties and forties had not aspired to change the hearts of those who for a century and a half had played the varying game of "in" and "out," and called it government. They had come simply to see that the game took into account the huge new interests, to see that "in" and "out" corresponded to

some real opinion of the country. That result had been achieved by the weight of the Reform Bill so swiftly that the north had learned nothing, having had no apprenticeship in which to learn. To this day their views were too immediate, too business-like. To see a way to an end was still enough for them ; and their famous common-sense made the end sometimes too easy of proof. It certainly made beginnings of precious little account. Though the south might be more slow, might be tiresomely alive to obstacles and difficulties, might fail to see ends down the avenues of mathematical means to them, yet it had more unity, kept a better hand on its references. Greatest of all differences, perhaps, was the fact that the middle-class which Ingram knew had not, like the northern middle-class, based its existence in public affairs on a class grievance. It had never found itself entrenched in one blackened half of a shire against great lords entrenched in the wide estates of the other half. It had never bruised a mercantile power against stiff park railings. It had been content with mere wealth for so much longer than the north that, when it stretched its hands for power, the railings, so to speak, had already vanished.

That indeed was no explanation of differences, but it was a clue to a quality which might explain them. Wealth in the north had come not only suddenly, but by distinct and alarming social upheavals. It had been in itself such power of life and death that it had had to be translated. It had as surely had to be translated into political terms as the sudden landed power of the Norman nobles had had to be translated into feudalism. Ingram was almost inclined to dally with the idea that the remarkable organisation of the north, the powerful mutual control of federated employers and union workmen, so far in advance of anything of the kind in the rest of the country, was an unconscious but inevitable reproduction of the mutual check of the feudal lords and the lawful villeins of the manors. But wealth in the south, coming more slowly in the slow changes of centuries, had meandered into countless channels. It had had time to take on a hundred meanings; and even yet its social and moral and æsthetic levels were infinitely various. It resembled a vast ramification of streamlets of achieved leisure, wandering at will, and beguiling the paths of wayfarers. Wealth in the

north seemed more like one of the great reservoirs. It was an immense dead level; it attracted you not by the flowers of a stream-side, but by the intellectual interest of seeing how humanity was capable of keeping such enormous dynamic potentialities under control. Its ethical containing-walls were rather hard, its edges difficult to adorn. It might in some respects be more definite in social service, but it was less generally fertilising than the easier-going streams. And its appearance in daily interchange, in such talk as Ingram had been listening to, was apt to carry out the analogy of reservoir supplies, and resemble the turning of a tap. Where wealth wandered more freely, opportunity, even with less wealth, was more free too. What after all, if one came back to that, had been the remarkable element in the marriage of Lady Rose and Matcham? Not the obvious superficial differences of condition, but the essential likenesses of outlook.

Ingram's thoughts were growing vague in the approach of sleep. They made a final effort to gather themselves up in the idea that the north was more insistent for the positive, and that his own class might very likely have to

define always by negatives. The latter seemed to him in the end the richer life, since to know that one lacked certain things was at least to know what those things were.

XV

THERE were yet a few more days of travelling wedged between speeches at meetings and less formal occasions, like dinner-parties ; so that Ingram had little time for reflection until he was settled in a train for the long journey south again. Then he found his recollections coming between his mind and the newspaper in which he was reading pleasant things about his speeches. Indeed he read more than mere compliments ; for the newspaper had gathered up all his speeches into a final comment, giving them thus the unity of a campaign. He had the satisfaction of seeing that they stood well the test of being regarded together, neither tumbling over one another nor telescoping into one another. What this meant to him in the eyes of his leaders began to piece itself into his meditations, which returned especially to the little club of working men, and the views of Wray and his comrades. He leaned back in his seat, staring out of the window ; and then almost jumped at the suddenness with

which the pieces took a pattern, and fitted together.

“Educated enough to do several things at once”—if that was what the working man was waiting for, was not the supply provided already? True, it was not mainly a supply of working men as yet; but Wray’s friend had said a wise word; the technical qualification did not deeply matter. Many of Ingram’s friends sat for working-class constituencies, and, thinking over their careers, he saw that several had become known to working men by various ways, not at the time designed to lead to Parliament—by lecturing to them, organising for them. In the very effort of these men, working people would more and more be associated with governing influences; and the whole tone and temper of the Labour party was surely growing more equable, more confident, included more currents, wider views.

Here these thoughts had a check. A vision came back to him of a meeting he had once attended for the furthering of a scheme of University education for working men. He recalled the cheerful speeches, the excellent and modest plans, the helpful attitude of the University authorities. And then he saw again

the uprising of a red-haired, downright Scotsman, a grocer's assistant, he remembered, who had seemed to shut all this talk down like a child's toy into its box. "It's all very well," he had cried, "but we don't want what universities give; we don't want your middle-class education, we don't want your middle-class history and economics. You can't give us what we do want; you have no other history or economics to give." It had depressed him at the time; it had sounded so *intransigent*—a voice of the newest generation. But now he doubted whether it was of the newest generation, for education of the kind the red-headed Scotsman wanted was an education to do one thing. That was the way towards an apotheosis of delegate membership of Parliament, towards the conversion of Parliament into a sort of uppermost Committee of innumerable local committees. And, though many signs seemed, as politics stood, to be pointing that way, Ingram now began to think that this was only because no other way was asserting itself by signs. Could the new ones be put up?

When he reached his chambers he found a note from the Richardsons, asking him to join their party at Ascot for Gold Cup Day. He

sat down and accepted at once, for, though he did not care for race-meetings, he appreciated Ascot. Racing was one of the sides of life which he was content to know by two or three specimens. He had seen Derby Day; he had been to Newmarket; and he had been to one of the small regular meetings that are, so to speak, the daily business of racing; and he felt no more curiosity about either its daily business or its festivals. Derby Day had given him chiefly an impression of colossal untidiness. He could always see again the huge hollow enclosed by the course and sloping slightly towards the grand stand, could see it as a blurred space, in which dingy canvas erections and staring big letters of bookmakers' names stuck up out of a blotched greyish mass of little faces and bodies. He could see again and smell again the countless booths set up by publicans, in which the motionless hot air was like a blow on the head; the bare puddly tables were loaded with coarse sandwiches, and the grass underfoot had turned into a sour-smelling morass of beer-droppings from the barrels behind the tables. Newmarket had had a cleaner, windier aspect; and the crowd there had been much more strongly leavened with gaitered men in square

hats, their hard cheeks polished, as well as shaved, by the razor ; and the air which the racing people had of being at home made the day much more in the tradition. Besides, he had liked the sight of the long strings of sheeted horses walking out on the wide moors ; and he had been entertained by seeing the roads marked with horse-hoofs out of all proportion to the wheel tracks. Finally, the smaller meeting he had seen had struck him as merely dull, though it was quite a well-known one. There was no large crowd, flowing all about the place, but two distinct groups, one by the rails near the finish, and one half-filling a wooden stand, near which was a brick club-house with a little lawn and garden. The whole thing seemed to be dropped into the uninteresting fields much as a second-rate prize-fight must have been dropped in the old days ; it had all the air of an expected, but detached, disturbance of the spot ; and the people who had come in from the neighbourhood were quite distinct from those who had come from town. The bored air of the auctioneer in his box after a selling race ; the widely spaced groups in the paddock ; the luncheon of cheap salmon and cold beef—all had so much the regulation air that

Ingram never wanted anything more of the kind.

But Ascot gave him pleasure, not least because one could enjoy the day from the beginning, it being no small merit that the morning gave no discomforts on the London platform. He betook himself thither happily on Gold Cup Day, and saw that all was as usual. There were the tall, trimly dressed men and the ladies in gay hats and long light cloaks, all moving placidly up the platform to look for seats, and, if none were left in the train, waiting as placidly for another special to come up. When it came there was the same polite filling of carriages, and the settling down, with nobody saying too much, and everyone saying what he did say in a charming voice. There might be a Royal Enclosure badge pinned among elegant fineries or on a black coat lapel opposite you ; but otherwise you were all the same calm people, whether you had a brown face, and dropped your final g's, and exchanged remarks about horses almost mysterious in elliptical reference, or were a mere politician asked down for the day.

In the Richardsons' box, when he arrived, Ingram found Mrs Richardson and Irene ;

Mr Richardson had gone down to the railing, from which a clamour of hard voices went up, a clamour which every now and then became quite rhythmical for a few moments, when all the bookmakers happened, in their monotonous litany, to return with one accord to the odds against a favourite, or to "the field, bar one." Mrs Richardson's bland absence of interest was as monumental here as elsewhere ; she sat in the box with the remote affability of a blind person of perfect manners. Ingram and Irene looked out, and gathered up the scene, the close throng on the lawn below moving slowly up and down, a good deal of it rather overdressed, but on the whole quiet enough to turn its head at the sight of a daring gown ; the bright green of the course between its white rails ; the marquees on the farther side, where clubs and regiments entertained, leisurely places giving glimpses of flower-decked tables, and surrounded by a discreet bustle of servants ; beyond them, above the distant side of the course, belts of pine-wood amid which comfortable red roofs appeared ; and on the horizon rolling masses of the trees of Windsor. The royal procession had driven up before Ingram arrived, so that he missed the grave little

ceremony, the four-horsed landaus with their green-jacketed postilions rolling on such silent wheels up the course, and almost as silently saluted on their passage. He had, in fact, only arrived just in time for lunch, and it was not until after the meal that he became aware of horses at all. Then Irene and he strolled off to the paddock, and amused themselves by trying to decide which were the finer gentlemen, those in beautifully made black coats crossed by the thin brown straps of slung field-glasses, with top-hats at the slightest possible tilt, and careful unmoved faces; or the elegant exquisites who were parading through the throng on such daintily lifted feet.

Irene thought there could be no doubt; the horses were too nervous to stand the comparison. Dark stains on their glossy flanks, wide eyes, heads flung up suddenly with a clink of the bit, betrayed them too openly. Ingram said:

“Oh, but you’re really missing the perfection of them. I grant you all that; the most imperturbable of gentlemen may be racked a bit before a race. But imagine being on edge, and yet able to walk so controlledly in a crowd where even humans can hardly avoid stepping

on a skirt. Take the regular test. If you didn't know what this place was, you might come in yonder, and I'll bet you couldn't tell at a distance, without watching, that there were horses among the people. What more do you want, if they pass in a crowd like that?"

"Poor old Black Eagle! They oughtn't to saddle him out here," said a man's voice behind them; and they heard a little flutter of exclamations and a rustle of quick movements, and the dull whack of hoofs coming down heavily on the turf.

A big black horse, with powerful quarters so high that they looked ugly, and a very plain head, was standing quivering under the trees in a corner; a stable lad at his head was watching his eye anxiously, while another hovered at the horse's side ready for a second cast with the tiny saddle and saddle-cloth. On the other side the trainer stood waiting to help instantly with the girths. The crowd, which had scattered at the last lash-out, was closing up again in a flood of chatter.

"Oh, perfectly fit," came another voice, as Ingram and Irene moved away, "but he always had that string-halt." A beautiful bay was going past with the jerky lift of the hind leg

to which the speaker had referred, and Ingram thought how tired the horse must be of always having that remark made by terribly knowing people. The runners for the Cup were parading now, and most people were clustered opposite a little mare with a fine delicate head, being saddled in one of the boxes. Her owner, who wanted to give her sugar, had had to talk to a slight elderly man with a white moustache, because he was a royal duke; certainly no less a personage could have worn everything, even to his tie, so extremely new and neat and prim.

"I suppose," Irene said, "we ought to go back to the box for the race."

"I suppose so. But no hurry yet; let's take another turn or two."

After a little silence Irene said suddenly:

"You're a queer person, Jack. I wonder why you care to come down here. No, not exactly that, because one sees you enjoy it; but I wonder why you enjoy it."

"I don't know, I'm sure," he laughed. "Except that it's really jolly to be in a place where everything is so perfectly done—where one sees horses like these, and men and women like these. They're awfully *fine*,

you know, trained, I mean, built, and ‘turned out’ ”

“ People *and* horses ? ” she asked, smiling.

“ Yes. Why not ? ”

“ Oh, well, your side hasn’t much use, has it, for this kind of people ? ”

“ Possibly not. But whose fault is that ? The point probably is that they have no use for us.”

“ Amiable catholic ! I wonder if you know what you have got a use for really.”

She gave her parasol a queer little twist, and he answered :

“ You, anyhow.”

“ Thank you, sir ! At this moment, perhaps.”

“ Moments ? I begin to count by years now.”

“ Yes, it’s long, isn’t it ? But some things don’t change much. I don’t think you’ve changed much since the old days ; you’re very much what you were.”

“ Am I ? I hoped that I’d changed, that I’d begun to get on in the world.”

“ Oh, you had to do that. But I expect other things too, because I’m critical.”

“ Oh, I know—I’ve always known that. I’ve always had a feeling of your reserved criticisms.”

Irene said nothing. Ingram was thinking of her last remark, and brought out abruptly:

“Do you really mean ‘because’?”

“‘Because’ what?”

“You said ‘because I’m critical.’”

“Oh yes, I meant it exactly, and we’ve just about missed the race now, so do come along.”

But they were well in time, even to see the canter down, with the pretty swinging of the jockeys standing in their stirrups, and their silk jackets dwindling to spots of colour slipping up the green slope. Then followed minutes in which the colours shifted uneasily in a broken line; then the spots suddenly ceased to cross and recross, the bookmakers stopped shouting, and a roar came up from the crowd. They were off. They came with a wild tumbling motion down the slope, and were past before they had fairly been seen. They rounded the curve away to the far side, and when they turned in again to the straight it was astonishing how clearly in the onrush details stood out, the violent spring of the horses—explosions under the small crouched riders—the rapid motion of a spurring heel, the hard sound of whips. Black Eagle’s huge

quarters sent him up the last rise in bounds, but the dainty little mare went too lightly for him. She had landed the Cup.

Ingram stayed for tea in the gay shady garden, and listened to the band. He was conscious that he was sharing sights and sounds with Irene. The consciousness stayed, and went back to town with him.

XVI

TURNING his thoughts over, as he sat that evening in the House, Ingram picked out one which was clear; he was looking forward to the next time of seeing Irene. Hitherto his relations with her had never objectively included a next time. Their meetings had fallen without conscious process in their recurrence. Now he found himself calculating that the Richardsons would stay at Ascot till Monday, and that on Tuesday he might pay the due call. But, when the day came, he found he need not have waited so long; the weather had broken, and they had returned to town on the Saturday. He said to Mrs Richardson, as she gave him tea, how he wished he had known, that he might have come on Sunday. She replied, with more apparent interest than usual, that she liked his coming at all; most young men did not take the trouble to do those things now. She thought they rang up on the telephone instead, but she wasn't sure, because Helps always

answered the telephone, and what he said was so extraordinary. Irene, coming up with some cups, said :

“Do I hear Jack explaining that he is more polite than other young men?”

“Exactly,” Ingram said, “so I hope you’ll come and be polite to me presently.”

When she came across to him later, and they found themselves alone, he said :

“I came back happy from Ascot.”

“Yes,” she replied, characteristically accepting his meaning. Then, more lightly, “We don’t usually quarrel, do we?”

“No; I begin almost to wish we had quarrelled occasionally.”

“Absurd person! We’ve never quarrelled, because we’ve gone on, as you were saying the other day, for years.”

“All the same I feel as if, since Ascot, I have somehow begun seeing you again. And yet there hasn’t been a break.”

Irene smiled, but rather gravely, as she said :

“I believe I’ve constantly been seeing you again in that way.”

“Have you? When? I wonder.”

“I sha’n’t tell you.” She now smiled quite

frankly at him ; " I don't even know that it was clear to me till you said it."

" Well, that brings me up alongside, after all, even if you've been ahead all the time. I think, you know, you generally were : I used to think so in the old days."

" Did you ? That makes me sound rather awful. Did you think me remote and wise when we were all rattling all over the place at home ?"

" Not much. But you seemed to be happy without being serious, and the rest of us were frightfully serious in our little hearts."

" Ah, you're not very penetrating. I was quite sore once." Then she smiled again : " But of course you were so serious that you were sore time after time."

Ingram laughed outright. " Oh, it was just that little irony of yours that one always knew. I'm glad to know I was right all the while."

" Because ?"

" Oh, because it means I am seeing you again, and not a different person."

" If I had been, you'd have found it out, I should think, before now."

" Should I ? I wonder how I'd have liked

that. I don't think I mind, though, if I've found out now."

"Oh, Jack, what are you talking about? You just said I wasn't different, and then you say you've found out now."

"Oh, I wasn't talking. I was just being oracular—and happy."

"I think you're being very young."

"Yes, rather! That too if you like. Dear me," Ingram got up to go, "it becomes appalling, the amount I've missed."

"Well," said Irene, with her smile again, "you're evidently not going to make up all arrears at once, so I won't be appalled."

"Ah, you haven't seen my three-line Whip which says five o'clock to-day in case of an early division."

"I bow, important person."

"But I am going to make it up to myself, you know," he went on. "Now I've begun seeing you again I want a lot of your time."

"What can I do but bow again? At your disposal, sir."

"Pooh, I don't believe it in the least. Will you come to something with me? A concert, or something?"

Irene reflected, with her head on one side.

"I don't know. You're in such a penetrating mood. Make some plan presently, and I'll see. I think I'm a little bored with 'things' just now, but I shouldn't so much mind doing nothing somewhere."

"Good. I'll write. Good-bye."

Then suddenly, as they shook hands, she looked at him. He was conscious next in order of an immense impulse to go on talking to her, to stand before her saying nothing, to go down the stairs three at a time, to hit his hat on the top when he had put it on, to say something very kind to Helps as he opened the door. It all made him walk at an astonishing pace.

For a day or two afterwards, he felt that he had suddenly begun to live in a whirl. His work, too, became heavy, for his Department, like all the rest, had its Bill to put forward; his chief and he were spending hours with the permanent heads, sifting the endless facts that had been classified for them, and trying to build them into shape. On one of these mornings, when the rest of the men had gone to lunch, and his chief was putting on his gloves, Ingram said:

"I wonder what you would think about

bringing Ross into this business. I've had it in my mind to suggest to you for some time now. He so obviously knows as much about the subject as anyone."

The chief turned an eye devoid of encouragement on the suggestion.

"I can't admit," he began severely, "that Ross knows as much as anyone." He was usually severe with Ingram, whom he appeared to regard as a clever child; perhaps the one witticism of his life had been his description of his under-secretary as "a heart of gold and a head of feathers." He continued, picking up his hat as if to show that the idea could not detain him, "I hardly see on what basis we could introduce a private member to these discussions; our measure must be strictly a Government measure."

Ingram, however, was not to be discouraged; he had his next card in his hand.

"You see, sir, Ross will be very active on this Bill in any case; he's never cared much about any other subject, and he has made his knowledge respected. Wouldn't there be an advantage in getting him, so to speak, on the Bill's side, before it appears?"

"That, of course, is a very natural considera-

tion. But I never believe that such bargains are wise; if they break down, as they almost inevitably do, the subsequent troubles are worse. The whole thing comes out."

Ingram suppressed a temptation to explain that, if it did come out that a Government department had consulted specialist outsiders, the country would only be delighted to hear it. He went back a stage in the conversation.

"I don't think that what I had in mind was bringing Ross to sit with us. That, I agree, might be difficult, and could hardly be fruitful. What I thought of was bringing him in on a looser string. I know him quite well, and, no doubt, could get him to talk to me."

The chief still demurred; nothing could be done without too much being given away. Yet Ingram perceived he was nibbling at the bait of getting the redoubtable Ross half-committed to his Bill. Finally he swallowed it, and Ingram was freed, with certain precautions, to go and talk to his friend.

Other matters intervened, and it was some days before he carried out his intention. Then the two happened to meet at the Foreign Office party on the King's birthday. It is an affair which from the outside wears sufficiently the

great look. The dark emptiness of Whitehall on a summer night stretching down to the clustered twinkle of the old-fashioned lamp-posts of Parliament Square begins slowly to be threaded by that yellow glow of carriage lamps which has grown so much warmer to the eyes since street-lamps turned a chilly blue. Soon the scattered moving lights grow into a chain that winds slowly round the corner of Downing Street; the chain doubles and trebles its strands; and on the other side of Whitehall a black polished line begins to appear, the carriages that have set down and are waiting. Motor buses still thunder past, but at a chastened pace. On the pavement a crowd has long been clustering, and from the almost stationary procession of vehicles come the clear clink of horses' bits, the running throb of motors, and the sharp, emphatic sound of a policeman's orders. Ingram never had any sympathy with the superior persons who could not comprehend why people liked to stand in the street and watch the gathering of a party. He used indeed to think that few of the parties themselves gave you the same sense of excitement as you had from these outer views—the Mall, for instance, on

the night of a Court, or Whitehall during an official party, full of the dark gleam and reflected lights of the surfaces of the carriages which made, with the warm lamps and the flash of harness on glossy skins, a rich subdued glitter. The toss of horses' heads, the occasional stamp of a hoof, and the endless rippling murmur of talk among the servants seem only parts of the silence of a long waiting carried out with professional ease. Ingram could not remember that even at his first Foreign Office party the inside had been as good as this comfortable profusion of elegance outside.

Guests were slowly mounting one of the more gloomy staircases, and Ingram caught himself wondering at what period England had adopted the notion of official receptions, what cynical minister had translated a fashion, that sat well enough on the great marble staircases and decorated rooms of nations more versed in publicity, into the sombre office look of a British Department of State. Presently the staircase led out to rooms of rather more pretension, and Ingram reached one in time to see the procession of ministers arrive, the Prime Minister with a princess on his arm.

Uniforms and stars and ribbons did what they could to make the scene look imposing; though the young Civil servants marched about in coats which are only effective with a great deal of gold lace, and unfortunately had in their modest grade very little. Colourless secretaries of leagues and societies hung desperately to individuals they knew; newspaper editors lent abstracted ears to wiseacres who saw exactly the way in which this or that line ought to be taken; fussy members of Parliament discussed the inner meanings of appearances that had none; and one room was reverberating with the loud voice of a journalist, who had a genius for translating the genuine knowledge he had into such verboseness that he seemed to be saying what everyone else could have said. Political agents, second-rate candidates, and obstinate supporters exchanged inflexible sentiments and opinions that had no vitality in them. The air teemed with phrases, phrases, phrases; many of the persons actually looked like phrases. Ingram's temper had begun to forsake him, when he caught sight of Ross. He edged across to him, and the two moved out of the room together, and leaned on the rail at the top of the main staircase.

The band was playing below in a bank of flowers between the two wings of the staircase. Ingram plunged into his subject :

“ We’re getting our Bill in hand.”

“ Good,” Ross answered. “ I suppose that means next session then. Glad you’re getting it so early.”

“ I hope that we may, but there’s a lot of work—one needn’t tell you ; look at the German stuff alone that one has to go through.”

“ Do you know, I never found the German facts of much use. In effect, the only parts of their system that seem to me to matter——” and he was off on a process of flying selection, which was the most valuable indexing of the subject that could have been offered. Ingram listened. Ross showed no curiosity about the proposals that Ingram’s Department was to produce, nor had he any scheme of his own to put forward. His talk was solely of facts, fusing them in a way which showed more and more his equipment ; he seemed to see every piece of the problem in cross-lights from other pieces of it. As he listened, it came vividly to Ingram’s mind that there were men in the House as well equipped on almost any subject the Government might tackle. Where were they

to come in? The reflection caused him to say to Ross at the end:

“Well, I’m glad of one thing. This Bill can’t come up without making your reputation.”

“Oh, can’t it, though?” Ross laughed. “Don’t suppose I shall speak much; I’m not much good in the House, you know. Besides, the other side will clutter it up with amendments, and one won’t want to clutter it more.”

“But the House will really want your ideas, my dear chap. You’re known to be the best man it has at the thing.”

“Useful for terrifying the other side, if I sit close, and look wise. However, they’ll get my ideas safe enough.”

He nodded, and passed down the staircase, leaving Ingram to yet another view of the new men in the House.

XVII

IT was not, after all, so easy to find the opportunities for "doing nothing" together that Irene had spoken of. When he began to search for them they were either insufficient or marked. However, picture shows, of which there were many entertaining and a few excellent ones open, generally worked out to doing nothing, and occasionally to getting no nearer to them than chairs in the park.

Two such occasions, filled with talk and an unexpressed well-being, had come about when Mrs Richardson fell ill. Her detachment of manner, acting in one respect to make the alarm more sudden, became also a plea for devoted attention. Irene gave it unreservedly, and the two went abroad at once. They were to spend some time at Nauheim, and afterwards to winter in Egypt. On their departure, Ingram was left for a few days feeling that he had not opened his mouth during them, though he had, of course, in fact talked to plenty of people. At the end of them he sat down and

wrote to Irene, the wail of a bored politician at the end of July, when the work of the House is like a tying up of parcels. He had worked continuously throughout the session, and though life had been moving happily he realised now that it had also moved very fast. Matcham thought him looking hipped and solitary, and took counsel with Lady Rose. The result was that one night, when the two men were dining together at the House, Matcham proposed that Ingram and he should take a month abroad. Lady Rose was going to Castle Morton, and the two of them could start out at a loose end, do a long walk, or settle in some place and fish. Finally they decided to make for the Black Forest, and follow their leading. Ingram wrote at once to Irene of his plans; but her response did not encourage him to think of making any digression to their populous Bad; her mother was really ill, and could not be left to nurses, so it would be hardly worth while for him to come.

The two men dropped off, therefore, one morning from the crowded Basle train at Freiburg. They had travelled most of the way with no more accommodation than the corridor

could provide ; and in consequence they felt that they had once for all exploded the legend of Rhine scenery. Not that they had set out in any scoffing spirit ; indeed, when above Niederlahnstein the train ran out on its ledge over the milky green river, they had had the authentic thrill, as they looked up the dizzy brown hillsides, and saw the straight little rows paraded on the terraces, and murmured to themselves the magic word, "Vines !" Nor did they suspect the first two or three ruined castles, perched like hooked vultures on the jut of the rocks. But when the twentieth and the thirtieth swerve round a corner gives you the identical composed picture, and the only variation is the way the swerve happens to bump your shoulder, then the hillsides take on a rustiness, the vines are ugly and stumpy, and the castles grow sentimental.

Freiburg was comforting. After a journey of that sort it is always comforting to drop off at a station ; you seem to score off the people in seats who thought you would have to go all the way in the corridor. The little town was very clean and untroubled. Without being so drained of life as Oxford is in the summer, it

wore the same aspect of a nice parent taking a rest from family cares. In the little square of the cathedral, before the little grey arches of the old Merchants' Hall, peasant women laid out their bright fruits and vegetables ; and who could doubt the solid worth of a nation patient enough to pick sackfuls of whortleberries ? Down each side of the streets ran clear channelled water, trapped far up on the sides of the hills. Ingram was continually amused by the toy-like simplicity of water-supplies in the Forest ; no broad-eaved house in a village but could steal a bit of streamlet in a narrow wooden trough to pour free by the back-door, and fill pails without even the trouble of turning a tap.

Within a few days the two had found their leading. They started to walk very leisurely up one of the main mountain valleys, and to wander over the heights of the Forest. It was pleasant to have no more work for the mind than trying to understand the soft broad German of the natives, or confronting the determination of the local schoolmaster at their inn of an evening to improve his English on them. Their fellows of the road were mostly Germans, walking with an energy which no

English people so stout would have dreamed of. But they came across a few English, and some of these the two were discussing one day, as they sat beside a little torrent in an inn garden.

“I can understand rich people with little curiosity travelling from boredom,” Ingram was saying, “or poor people with much curiosity making an effort to come abroad. But it’s amazing that people should make the effort when they’re of the kind that gets no real mental impression even out of things at home with which they are to some extent familiar.”

Matcham nodded ; then he said :

“It’s not less amazing, though, that you and I travel like this. A hundred years ago we shouldn’t have done it, or dreamed that we could. A parson’s son and a lawyer’s son then——” He shrugged his shoulders. “If we could have done it, I wonder if we should have wanted to. What made our kind conscious of such things ? Think of Dickens and Thackeray in America ; it was to them a barren business with nothing but an unsatisfactory sociological aspect.”

“Yes ; and the Grand Tour of the young

nobleman was only a blending of polite society, some conventional mountains and ruins, and some notorious pictures."

"Still," Matcham answered, "we're only copying that, after all, whatever differences we put into it. The queer thing is our being able to copy it—if, indeed, our improving on it isn't more queer. Fancy starting where our kind did, and becoming so exacting! So late a generation as our own fathers were still drawing lines round the region (and I mean the range of life, as well as the range of travel) in which they might expect to find what was good for them. As for things being good for us—well, we'll tell you when we see 'em."

"Nothing's worth while for us *tout simple*, I guess. Let's hope we put in nearly as much as we get out. But in some ways we're a bit too much set on the getting out, too much interested in our consciousness. Come on, there's lunch; come and eat undersized trout."

Politics came up but rarely in those days. Once Ingram threw down a magazine, which had been sent after him from England, and said impatiently:

“Another ass writing about the extinction of the private member in the House.”

“Yes,” Matcham agreed, “they all say the same things.”

“And the things are such pernicious half-truths, too. As if a private member were useless unless he speaks once a week, and carries a Bill once a session! Or as if Government Bills were of some different order, and not private members’ work at all! Men who have got anything in them are not extinguished.”

“And some are not extinguished who have nothing in them,” Matcham added. “The men who laboriously keep themselves out of what they call extinction very often have no time to think of anything else.”

Later on, when they were walking up to one of the three summits of the Forest, Ingram came back to the subject:

“The worst of all that stuff about the private member is that it’s out of date. I’m not sure that it wasn’t always out of date. As soon as the private member’s time began to be curtailed he began, I believe, to get to work in other ways. I’m certain he’s

been more of a pressure on Government since then."

"And he's going to be more still," Matcham said. "The way time was taken up in an important session with a thing like the Army Reform Bill won't last much longer. It's rash to prophesy, but I'd bet the next Liberal Government will become aware of a new kind of control. The extinction of Cabinet Councils is more real than the extinction of the private member. They'll become mere committees of detail."

"Oh, you've heard that, too, have you? I believe it's true. They say that the Cabinet now never looks at any long reach of policy. It has its agenda, and works only on that."

"And the headings of its agenda are written for it," Matcham concluded, "by the private member. I say, hadn't we better hurry? Look at those clouds."

They had come out from the close ranks of pines, and were at the foot of a great blunt grassy cone, on the top of which stood an hotel and a tower. The suddenly opened view showed them that the hot blue sky, which was all they had seen in their glimpses between the trees,

was being cut in half by an enormous piled mass of cloud, savagely black underneath. The two breasted the rise quickly, but it was half-a-mile to the hotel, and the wind of the storm was already rushing before it. They reached comparatively level ground in a desperate struggle, blinded with gravel whirled furiously up into their faces. At last from the welcome shelter of the hotel they looked down, breathless, at a grey, corrugated, torpedo-nosed mass, driving below them at a dizzy pace. It was the head of a thunder-cloud, and they were just above the storm, which all that evening smote the Forest. The hotel proprietor smiled, and congratulated them.

“You will see the Alps to-morrow,” he said, “and in summer one can only see them after a great rain.”

In the morning they leaned from their windows. The huge grassy dome of the mountain fell away into fir woods, which sank down, and rose again all round on numberless hills. From every valley the last low clouds of the night, swept by the airs of the morning, were flying up and over the crests in streaming grey wisps. Far in front the sombre curves of the

hills melted into vagueness ; and the two men had looked long, before they understood that the magical line, brilliantly white, far up in the blue, was not cloud, but mountain peaks.

XVIII

THE session of the next year opened for the Liberals with an anxiety which only gradually became apparent. The innermost circle had known for some time that the Prime Minister's health was failing more rapidly than he would admit. He had never recovered his strength after the death of his wife. In his devotion to her, he had added to the strain of his first year of government the strain of a continual watching; night after night, as his colleagues knew, he had passed from long hours on the Treasury Bench to vigil by her bedside. Her death left him an old man, and it was becoming clear that his age was too great to allow him to recover. There was good reason for the party's anxiety. The two years past had seen much accomplished, but they had also seen many disappointments. Though one of the great tasks which Liberalism had set itself had been carried through—the grant of self-government to the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony—another had failed.

The House of Lords had rejected the Education Bill. There remained one outstanding point of policy from the tooth-and-nail fights with the last Tory Government, the regulation of the licensing system ; and the Government had promised to make it the chief measure of this year. This time was a sorry one for facing the probable loss of a leader, and the uncertainties and mistrusts which would inevitably result.

The whole agitation over the relations between the State and the licensed victualling trade was a jarring of reforms, interests, legal decisions, temperance movements, and teetotal movements, impinging upon one another at all sorts of angles. Teetotalers, by a curious irony, found a positive difficulty in the decline of drinking habits, by which the public was led to think that the evil was dying a natural death. The Act of 1902, to which Liberals so strongly objected as an entrenchment of the trade in a position never before accorded it by law, was itself in origin a measure for reducing the number of public-houses. Brewing was inextricably entangled with retailing. The root of the curious contradictions which so deeply complicated the question was undoubtedly in

the trade's own situation. Financially it had too many rotten members. It had occurred to certain brewers, some years earlier, that it would be more profitable, instead of competing in the open market, to make sure of a certain number of houses in which only their particular products would be sold. The idea once launched went rapidly out of control. The prices asked for licensed houses ran to extravagant heights, and yet no large brewing firm dared to let itself fall behind in acquiring them. Enormous capital was needed for sinking in these purchases; firm after firm floated itself at huge figures. Much of the buying was pure speculation, the prices of licensed houses ceasing to be regulated by the trade done in them, and being based instead on the number of firms bidding for them. But the time necessarily arrived when the trade done in them was the only element remaining, and in too many cases it bore the poorest relation to the capital which had been expended. The brewing industry itself was sound enough. It had, indeed, in an earlier time, seemed to be too little aware that it managed a chemical process; but the Germans had waked it to the fact, and, waked, the English brewers had not been slow to

encourage chemists of their own. Probably only the cotton trade was its equal for cleverness of process, and alertness to new possibilities. Nevertheless, the "tied-house" system, which it had fastened round its neck, was dragging it into insolvency. It was by no means the smallest sign of the trade's alertness that it saw positive relief for itself in the movement for the reduction of licences. The decline of the drinking habit had spread far beyond the leisured rich; if the three-bottle man was dead, the bar-loafer was disappearing also. Increasing railway facilities, cheap bicycles, and even the much-abused taste for looking-on at football matches, had broken up the old habits of spending holidays and half-holidays in public-houses. Teetotallers no longer relied solely upon moral arguments; their ranks were reinforced by sober persons who said that perpetual drinking might or might not be immoral, but was obviously, in the modern world of trade competition, stupid. That encouraged the doctors to say their word; and the trade had to face on all hands a very decided inclination to reduce the facilities for drinking. The police perceived their chance of getting rid of haunts which gave them much

trouble, and benches of magistrates were thus offered another incentive for reduction. The brewers saw the whole tendency, and were genuinely wishful to meet it. They had no desire to be associated with some of the houses they had bought under the pressure of competition, houses which now reflected but ill upon them ; moreover, a general narrowing of the retailing ground would reduce expense. It would also mean, they could quite sincerely argue, better supervision of the remainder. The trade, in fact, would have liked to meet the reducing tendency. It would have been placed well with the world, and have met its own needs, if by an absolutely inclusive agreement, binding all firms alike, the financial loss incurred by the suppression of licences could have been adjusted within the circle. But such an agreement could not be made inclusive. The cry for reduction was urgent, and the trade had to make up its mind that legislation could not be avoided.

Then the confused issue could at last be given war-cries. The Act setting up a compensation system out of a fund levied on licences naturally had had to assume that there was an interest for which compensation was

due. The extreme reformers now said that, if the trade was going to appeal to the law, the law it should have; and the law was that every licence expired annually, and no one could have any purchasable interest in it on any other basis. For the most part, this was an extreme view, deliberately taken; reformers knew as well as the trade that interests cannot always be logically assessed, and that in this case, for instance, good management, decency of buildings, and the whole level of care taken in the public-house reasonably depended on the belief that the principle of annual expiration would never be enforced, unless the house gave some ground for action against it. It was worth while to keep the extreme facts in the foreground, because the question would be handled the next time by a party with which the trade would not trust itself to confer except on a clear basis of hostility. The brewers would have been as uncomfortable as the most ardent reformer, if the issue had not been put in its extreme terms. The swords were out. But there was play for them. The trade said: "We have our assured position, our freehold, if you like, and you are getting your reductions by it." The reformers said: "Unfortunately you

have a freehold. We were careless enough to let you 'squat' on the land, and that, we believe, in time constitutes a title to possession. All we can do is to buy your freehold from you, and that we will do."

Politically that was the situation. Strategically it was one which would require all the force and skill that the Liberal party could put into it. They had, to begin with, to upset an Act already working for the reduction of licences; and thus were at every turn confronted with irritation. They had to carry the weight of being charged with wanting to put an end to all drinking, because the teetotallers were on their side, and with exercising pure animosity, because the trade's influence at elections was opposed to them. They were accused at one and the same time of having too many principles, and having none. Moreover, as it necessarily happened that it was the teetotallers who cared enough about the matter to give their brains to its complicated finance and its difficult statistics, the trade was at any given moment confronted with the genuine abolitionists, with whom, naturally, no kind of conference was practicable.

Even had there been no crux of this kind it

was a time when the Government would have wished to be undistracted. Commerce, though not uneasy, was rather subdued; the working people were urgent for the Old Age Pensions scheme; the cost of the navy was growing. The best of governments would have been better undisturbed. But the bulk of the Liberal party had other anxieties, more or less patent. Were they not now face to face with the prospect of a Cabinet controlled by those who, eight or nine years earlier, had acted as if Liberalism had not power to stand a blast of unpopularity? Was the control to go to men who, having bowed to a popular demand for war, might have little courage now, if the populace shouted that workhouses were necessary and right, and perpetual licences right? Over-agitated Liberals forgot their own strength. They forgot the momentum of their own state of mind, if certain individuals in the Government should forsake it. They forgot that members of the Liberal League who had joined the Government must have done so with the clear knowledge that, bargains or no bargains, any reconstruction which might have to be made would already be more than half provided for.

The debate on the address was hardly over before some of the fears became certainties. The Prime Minister could no longer come down to the House. The time came at which it was the King's habit to go abroad to a less easterly air than English springs offer; and London was agog with contradictory rumours that he was, and was not, altering his plans for this year. Finally it was announced that he was going as usual. But, before he went, he visited the Prime Minister in Downing Street; and he was then bidding farewell to an adviser whose career had been in some ways as astonishing as any that has brought a man to the right hand of the Crown. Left by an easy-minded predecessor to bear the brunt of criticising the inception and the conduct of the Boer War, he had come through the ordeal with only one phrase quoted from him against him, and that not an ill-tempered one. An uninspiring holder of office before, as a leader he was not brilliant; but fight was itself the inspiration of the party under him, and all they demanded was that the fire they could well provide should be in hands in which it would burn clearly. And clear he was, honest to the last ounce. He spoke clearly, and he could be

silent. He knew better than to talk of one thing, or on one level. He was kindly, and loved his ease, and socially was never a bore. He was not, like Mr Gladstone, an infliction to the Crown ; he could make the King laugh. He had managed a difficult Cabinet without any leakage, and he had restored to Government a dignity of closed mouths, which it had come very near losing. He may have plodded, but he did not fumble. It might be said by some that he trod on toes rather than waved fiery crosses ; but the exclamations of the trodden-on sufficed to show his party where he was. They found him always where they expected to, and that was mainly his secret. There were those, of course, who said that they never could understand how a man who had spoken as he had in the war-time could ever be Prime Minister afterwards. But they were people whose party, as it stood, was the creation of a Jew who had taken the Premiership for a toy.

XIX

A FEW weeks later Irene received a long letter from Ingram. He wrote: "There is no need to give you the sad news. The personal loss is greater than any of us anticipated, and the signs of national esteem are really remarkable. You will have heard of our changes. Here we are, through them all safely, a little breathless, but as yet discerning no sulphur or cloven hoofs. If I were a real letter-writer, in the tradition of the diarists, I suppose I should give you all the club gossip about the King being abroad at such a time, the chatter of the old fogies who discovered suddenly, when Asquith had to go to Biarritz, that our casual country was left without a King, a Prince of Wales, or a single Prime Minister; no Crown and no Government. But the fact is, hardly anyone discovered all this, and nobody worried about it. Not even Walpole could have found much to write about. In effect, when you come to look at it, we have done little more than carry on as we were. Both the financial forts

are held by the Free Trade guns. We shall have more of the platform in our Budget speeches now than the House has been accustomed to ; and deputations to the Board of Trade will get more space in the newspapers. But both those appointments were absolute conditions of going on at all. True, we might have had another Prime Minister, but I don't think he would be inclined for two or three years of short-range politics—large, round, plumpy cannon-balls to hit the elector between wind and water. So he goes to the House of Lords, and everyone thinks it 'ironical,' whatever they mean by that, and we shall have to wait a generation, or perhaps several, for another man to remind us that democracy is government of the people, as well as for the people by the people. I wonder by what twist of chance we missed the man when we had him. Well, we may still keep glimmerings of the idea, but I expect we are going, for the moment, to govern from the platform. At any rate, here we are, with no positive holes in the Ministry ; there isn't a fool in the lot. And, what's very much more, we are not treating office as a kind of ladder in which some rungs are only worth getting on for stepping off. I hope Government will never

slip back now into thinking the Post Office and the Local Government Board not worth a man's time. What looks least like being worth a man's time just now is the Admiralty. Anyhow we seem to think so; we're practically asking it to run itself, which, to judge by its estimates, it's very well able to do. We still have some of our House of Lords veterans, but the brunt of work there will come on the Colonial Secretary. He has in an acute form the deprecatory style which is the acme of modern manners; he is always apt to come to his own subject by way of 'If I may venture to speak for the Department I represent.' However he will be made angry by-and-by, and his manners will have an edge on. As for the Commons, Asquith is told he must cultivate suavity of manner. His face looks more likely to develop craggy eyebrows and a Gladstone glance, which would be better. For the rest our unmoved ones are remarkably unmoved. One of them inspects Volunteers with great profundity, in an overcoat and a cigar. The other has appointed one day a week for answering questions put to his Department, and some temerarious people still poke their noses into our foreign dealings, but that door is such a small crack open that the noses

mostly get pinched. However, I grow ribald, and had better remain, Yours, also in the ministerial sense unmoved." He added a post-script: "Our Bill is coming on early, but the worst of our work on it is over."

In spite of this declaration there remained enough to keep both Ingram and his chief glued to their seats in the House. Every day brought its batch of amendments, and they were astonished when the fact suddenly dawned upon them that not more than two verbal alterations and one considerable suggestion stood in Ross's name. The chief was deeply gratified. His under-secretary reserved his opinion, and went the next morning to see Ross. Face to face with him Ingram came almost immediately to the point:

"Look here, I don't imagine we've done so well that you can't find more suggestions to make. You're not so simple to meet as all that; and besides, I know that, much as we talked, lots of the things that you wanted didn't get put in."

Ross got up, crossed the room, and searched in a leather case. He came back to his seat with a copy of the Bill in his hand, and gave it to Ingram. It was networked with red-ink annota-

tions, excisions, and insertions, and had several slips of paper gummed into its margin, which contained whole new clauses. Ingram turned the pages, and said :

“ I see ; this is your Bill.”

“ Yes,” Ross answered, “ but you `know perfectly well that that would mean a whole session’s fight, the Lords would scent disagreement, and call the Bill ill-considered, and probably reject it. You couldn’t accept one half of it.”

Ingram looked melancholy, and Ross returned to his leather case. He produced another copy of the Bill. This had fewer marks upon it, mostly in black ink.

“ And what on earth is this picture-book ? ”

“ Depends on your official common-sense, but I should call it a workable, though imperfect, measure, largely constructed by the Tories themselves. Having now been a pompous ass, I will explain. Those black writings are the amendments now on the papers of the House. The red ones—and here I simply give away the show to you—are suggestions in regard to certain of them, which would, if you like, make many of the amendments quite possible to

accept. Just look a minute—" they pored together over the document "—here, for instance. Now, one sees what that man means. It won't do, of course, but offer to take his amendment if he'll say 'two' instead of 'five.' The chances are that he will, and then you've got him, because——" And Ross went on to explain how surprised that Tory would be.

Ingram was looking more carefully over this copy of the Bill than over the other.

"Of course," he said at last, "we've seen a good many of these chances already, but we've missed some. And, after all, why should we steal the whole thing? This is yours; why not make the most of your opportunity?"

"Oh, it's not mine more than Bardon's, or White's, or Pettison's, or half-a-dozen others'—or others's. We've worked together on the thing ever since it came out."

"Well, White and Pettison are getting something out of it. They are sure to be fairly forward in Committee."

Ross looked at his visitor fixedly, and then said:

"You went too early into Government, old man. You'd have found as much work and

more fun outside. You're a pampered person now, who's sure, when he gets on his feet, that the Speaker will know he's instructed to say something. But down the House we have to 'work' the Speaker a bit. He thinks I'm a high-principle man, so all I get is very occasional chances on second readings. But he looks on White as a man of reason, and Pettison as a man of brevity, so they're our firing line. And we've a few reserves."

"Well, I sha'n't give you away, even when you're firing most furiously at our Bill."

"We're not going to do that. Why, we want the blessed thing. None the less, we probably shall be worth watching. Only heaven send you know when to give in to us, and when not!"

Of that possibility Ingram, knowing his chief, felt very doubtful. But his Bill was to receive unexpected help, and in the full tide of it he wrote again to Irene:

"We're in luck, and have a House as good as gold. It has taken to the primmest attention to business, and the most amiable rapidity, and the reason is—Women's Suffrage. There have been one or two rows in Parliament Square, and any number of interruptions of

meetings; and the result is that the House feels such an injured innocent that it behaves like an innocent, and our Bill is swimming. Yet we're a bothered lot of men. There's no way out now. We couldn't possibly introduce the sort of Bill the women want, though I wish we had said so a little more definitely at the beginning. It's irritating that they go on as they do. I don't mean their 'militant methods' (oh, the whole thing is phrased, and titled, and docketed, to perfection), but the idiotic way of going on saying that we can do what they want, if only we will. They really seem to think that, because four hundred and twenty members have expressed varying kinds of approval of varying methods of enfranchising women, therefore any Bill has that support in the House. Luckily it takes two to make a quarrel, and therefore most men are in a temper too. I can't imagine for the moment any situation more healthy. If we were all calm and dignified and argumentative the whole affair would be ridiculous. As it is, it has the dignity of a complete impasse. It's curious how level their speaking is. They've not got first-rate speakers, but they've got no fourth-rate ones either. They are enjoying a good deal of 'having it both ways.' They

go out of an evening for what they know will be a street struggle, and are heroines if they are jostled. They go to prison feeling like Joan of Arc, but demand the warmest sympathy for having to wear prison dress. If that kind of thing, or the nervous strain of interrupting meetings, costs them heavily, it's we, and not they, who should be adding up the total, and, until we begin to, it's little to the purpose their doing it. No man knows where it's all coming out; we only know where for the present it isn't. They place us in a hopeless predicament. If we say that we can't suddenly clap a few million electors on to the register, that we can do nothing except by a tremendous process of reform, redistribution, possibly even a new principle of registration, they reply that we never thought of that before; which, as a reason for not thinking of it now, seems feeble. They make us think enough! In their speeches they are always contrasting a certain type of unenfranchised woman and a certain type of enfranchised man. This may prove useful, because, even if the former does not get her vote, we may some day be encouraged by these representations to deprive the latter of his. The more they run that point of qualification,

the better many of us will be pleased. But they tell us that all details are for us to work out, and they go on in effect maintaining the sex qualification as the only one. They think that women as women should have votes on the terms on which men as men have them. I suppose it would be very difficult to restrict the suffrage now, but I expect most of us would like to see an educational qualification put on, and nothing beyond that—no sex or residential disabilities. Let's hope the Tories will do something of that kind presently; we hardly could. They might see enough votes in the scheme to make it worth their while. But of course the whole agitation will drop with a run when the Tories come in. The militants know very well that half the tolerance they get from a crowd is due to vague popular feeling that Liberals ought to do something for them; nobody will think that Tories ought to do anything, and most of the people who smile at interruptions of Liberal meetings would be scandalised at interruptions of Tory ones. You'll see very little trouble if the Tories come in. It's rash to prophesy, but it's possible, I think, that in a few years they may talk of some kind of women's suffrage. They

would get a great deal of electioneering done for them, because the best of cutting your political opinions down to one subject, and ostentatiously leaving out the rest, is that you can ultimately adopt whichever side takes it up. It's all very well as long as the agitators have only had to deal with one side, but when they have had to abuse the legislation of both, one imagines their political convictions will be hazy. It's a mercy that all I have to do with the subject is to write you rambling letters. By the time you get this we shall be in the Licensing Bill."

XX

THE debates on the Licensing Bill began with the inevitable exchange of heavy shot, Liberals talking about the trade's "entrenchment in monopoly," and Tories about "attempted spoliation." Yet for a short time it was curiously difficult to gauge the respective forces, and there was uncertainty as to how far the Opposition Front Bench meant to commit itself. The Opposition leader was a good deal away from the House in poor health, and this added to the uncertainty. But it soon was clear that his second-in-command had orders, and that Opposition to the Bill was to be a full-force affair. The trade showed itself little at first ; there were bitter speeches at shareholders' meetings, but some weeks passed before public-house windows all over the country flamed out into posters.

The second reading was not over when, one day, the Lobby, which the interests of the debate had been keeping empty, sprang into life. It was not merely fuller ; the groups had

a different appearance. Men no longer idled about, half-attending to what they were saying and half looking for other persons to talk to. They clustered in knots, spoke more earnestly, looked more alert. Liberals broke away from their groups, strolling slowly in couples down the long corridor to the library, or into the public lobby. Tory circles broke into cheerful individuals, nodding to one another, and disappearing. The Chief Liberal Whip, coming out of the House, checked a moment at sight of the crowded Lobby, and then went with long strides across to his room, keeping his eyes fixed on the little doorway that led to it, and seeing no one. A couple of Conservative Whips, chatting at their ease, watched him gravely. One or two members made to intercept him, but the crowd was dense, and they missed his coat-tails by inches. One of them, turning back baffled, caught sight of a dark pale man in a heavy coat at the edge of the crowd.

“Hullo, Bowlby,” he said. “Is it going to be you?”

The man shook his head. “How d’ye do, Raymond? No, I’m not going in. They won’t want too extreme a man. But it is a certainty then?”

“Practically. Hamborough’s just back from

the hospital, I believe. Oh, there he is—excuse me.” And Raymond shot across to a group that had suddenly imprisoned a tall, white-haired new-comer. But, as he reached it, the group dissolved, and one of its members, cannoning into Raymond, said in answer to his hurried question :

“Hamborough says it will be over in an hour.”

The tidings were echoed through the Lobby, and every man who entered was caught into one of countless discussions. From every quarter came scraps of one theme : “Desperately unfortunate, just at this time ”—“Didn’t seem so serious either ”—“The local association quite unprepared, they say ”—“Begged him to stay away, and take it easy ”—“Candidate they had before, and he’s been working lately ”—“London constituency, too ”—“Most unlucky ”—“Simply bound to move the writ at once ”—“Not a doubt of it, and it will show them ”—“Oh, my dear fellow, any money you like on it.”

Two men walked across the corner from the library corridor to the door into the House. One had longish dark hair slightly touched with grey, brushed straight back from a square forehead, and eyes full of laughter, which shot

quick glances into the crowd. The other held a young but heavy head thrust curiously forward, as if he were butting, and the protuberance above his eyebrows emphasised the heavy look. He was speaking in a lisping voice, which even in the hubbub was penetrating.

Groups stopped talking, and looked at the two, but let them pass. There was no news they could give.

"Well, if those two will lend a hand," said a Liberal member. "But you never know. They both need audiences who can be moved, and the South Londoners——" He shrugged.

"If it were only not London!" a man sighed, as a hundred had sighed within the last hour.

"I don't know, after all," said another. "There's one thing about having it in London: we couldn't have spared ministers now to go off into the country. Here we can have them all turned on—they need only leave the House for an hour or two."

"That's all very well," was the answer. "But it means also all the concentration the other side can produce."

"And a constituency that's theirs, really," a new voice added. "We only won it in the 1906 boom; we'd hardly have held it in any case."

But to have it go back just at this moment—oh, Lord ! And it will be a ‘great victory’ for them, of course, though the wretched place never was ours.”

“Oh, swear and be done with it, old man,” said Matcham, who had joined the talkers. “After all, what does it matter ? The Bill is young yet.”

“Ah, but a bye-election in the north, where we could have been sure of winning, would have given it such a lift, after all the talk of public opinion—that is, if we were to have a bye-election at all.”

This was the origin of all the talk : in the very midst of the first tide of energy for the Licensing Bill a Liberal member was dying. The consequent bye-election would inevitably be used by the Tories, should they win it, as a popular pronouncement against the Bill. And they were almost certain to win it.

No one who was in that election will forget it ; though neither side can wish to remember it. It was more like the riot of a country-town fair than a Parliamentary election. The main part of the constituency was one of those portions of London which, having been suburban villages, retain, long after they have

been swallowed by the town, vestiges of their former condition. So here, though the old open spaces had taken on the seared urban appearance, and the half-rural retreats of eighteenth-century merchants had almost all disappeared, there yet remained a High Street, traceable by more than name. If you raised your eyes above the level of the plate-glass and blatant shop signs, you could still see building full of character and variety. That, no doubt, had its influence in making one think of a country fair. But never before had such a crop of temporary organisations sprung up in the business of electioneering. Some, which were nominally independent, like the militant suffrage societies, were in practice anti-Liberal. Others, mysterious in origin, such as a body calling itself the Coal Consumers' League, were ostensibly Tory. The Tariff Reform League and the Free Trade Union thundered against one another at the same, or neighbouring, corners ; and the various avowed leagues of brewers and licensed victuallers filled up every remaining space. Nor was it only the temporary platforms, with their canvas signs and banners, that gave the cheap-jack appearance. Every day "object-lessons"

rolled up and down on waggons—men dressed as miners with lumps of coal, imported manufactured goods with staring labels of their country of origin, women suffragists in prison dress. Local business seemed to have come to a standstill; indeed, half the shops in the High Street were obscured by platforms. But with so vast a crowd along the pavements the public-houses were kept occupied; and that, to censorious eyes, looked as though beer were flowing to command, and open house being kept. Every day at the dinner hour came an outbreak of furious competition among the organisations for the best “pitches” by the gates of factories or workshops, and the competition often developed into cheerful violence. A clever speaker on either side would set himself, if he lost the best place, to drawing off his opponent’s crowd, and then inciting it to upset his opponent’s platform. The women suffragists, presenting the populace with the newest spectacle, were always fairly sure of an audience, and handled it skilfully.

In a few days the extraordinary character of the contest spread its rumour through London, and then the fair became even more thronged than before. City clerks, abbreviating

their lunch, would take a tram to the sights; members of Parliament would run over in an afternoon; and in the evening out came the naphtha flares, the public-houses blazed, and the hoarse voices of speakers rose amid the rolling of packed trams and the deafening shuffle of thousands of drifting feet. How many of the crowd were electors, whether any of them, in fact, were electors, no one could tell. To the paid speakers of leagues, inured to haranguing at a venture, this made no difference; but the older sort of political speakers—members who were lending a hand, and lights of local associations—felt like preachers in Hyde Park on Sunday, pouring out their oratory on a casual company that came from anywhere, and would disperse fruitlessly. As if to give a final touch to the effect of the whole affair being “run” by showmen, there appeared a trick of keeping opponents out of possession, even for a night, of the few halls large enough for meetings. A Tory newspaper was credited with the device of having an understanding with the proprietor of a cinematograph, who took the main hall for a fortnight, and found himself unable to suspend his exhibition for Liberal

meetings, though Tories were able to persuade him.

Liberals had in every direction been taken by surprise. They had a candidate ready ; but they had not reckoned with the eruption of interests. Probably, indeed, the Tories themselves had not an idea of the whirling pace at which things were to be taken. Everyone had heard of fresh organisations during the last few months, but no one had foreseen the degree of their natural outpouring upon a constituency which gave them opportunity for much show with comparatively small expenditure. This was a very different affair from having to send speakers on long railway journeys, and pay long hotel bills ; it involved nothing but tram fares. Afterwards there was much talk about the disturbance of the intentions of the electoral laws by this tremendous growth of paid electioneering, the expense of which did not appear in the returning officer's statements. It was a growth obviously likely to upset bye-elections, in which, as the suffragists had shown, concentration on the one spot made great effect. And though these minor leagues could never hope, in the universal work of a General Election, to cover

much ground, yet, once the question had been raised, it was equally open to argument that the older leagues had created a situation never contemplated by the electoral laws.

At last the hurly-burly was finished, the voters, very self-conscious by that time, had been conveyed to the poll, and the Tories had carried the seat.

XXI

FOR the whole of the summer the Licensing Bill was practically the only subject in politics. Even the Old Age Pensions Bill failed to balance public interest, or to divert it to any great extent. But after the bye-election the heat of the controversy died down for a while, and the trade might almost have been thought to have relaxed its efforts.

Coming into the Lobby one afternoon, Matcham noticed Cerney in conversation with a small man who was talking rapidly. Constituents interviewing members often talk rapidly, and Matcham would have taken no more notice had he not caught signals from Cerney's eye. It was an inviting eye, and Matcham walked towards him. Cerney waited till he came up, and then said :

"Come and have tea, Matcham. I was just going to take Mr——" He hesitated.

"Benson," the small man said obligingly.

"—— Mr Benson to have some tea. Come with us."

Matcham knew that the invitation must convey something, and the three went down the corridor to the strangers' smoking-room. Mr Benson trod sedately, and appeared to derive pleasure from getting past the various police on duty. When they were seated, and tea had been ordered, Cerney said to Matcham :

“Mr Benson is an organising secretary.”

“Yes?” Matcham said politely, turning to the stranger. “Secretary of what?”

“Just plain organising secretary, Mr Matcham. Of anything that turns up, you might say. It's seldom that there isn't something going on which has to be put before people, you know, has to be brought home to them. And people are busy, sir, very busy in these days, and haven't time to look into things that are not put to them straight. And of course you gentlemen haven't the time—one might perhaps venture to say, haven't the experience—to put things in their way. It's principles, state matters, with you, when with them it's bread and cheese, or, as I was saying to his lordship just now, a glass of beer. And that brings us, my lord, if I may assume this gentleman to be equally interested with yourself, back to our business.”

Catching an appeal in Cerney's glance Matcham said :

"Oh no. Do let me interrupt a little. I'm full of curiosity. Do you mean, Mr Benson, that you devote yourself to putting things, as you say, to people?"

"Well, I do make a profession of it."

"Really! I had no idea—and how exactly does your profession work?"

"Oh, you know those leagues and committees that are formed on all public questions nowadays? Well, sir, they have to be attended to, don't they? Letters have to be written, names got, pamphlets distributed, meetings arranged. And all that needs organisation, and organisation, in the country where I learned it, is a profession."

A light broke upon Matcham. "Ah, you're an American?"

"No, I'm not an American. But I learned a great deal in that fine country, and I guess it's going to be useful here."

"I hope so, for your sake, Mr Benson. Have you been long at the business?"

"Oh no; it's quite new, you might say. I take your 'Tariff Reform League to be about the beginning of political leagues as business

affairs, run on business lines for a business purpose. But once it's started, you see how it spreads."

"It does indeed," Matcham admitted. "Still, I should hardly have thought it provided a safe living yet."

"It doesn't," Mr Benson agreed. "But pioneers, sir, pioneers——" And he finished the toast.

His manner was so important that Matcham frankly permitted himself to be entertained. He would otherwise have had qualms, for Mr Benson himself looked far from important ; his clothes were tidy, and his collar passably clean ; his hands were not clean, but he saved you embarrassment about them by his own complete unconsciousness of the fact. His face was unhealthy, and his eyes, if you did happen to catch them, were anxious. He curled himself into curious attitudes, as if he would have been more at his ease standing. It was fairly obvious that for the present his profession consisted largely in making other people feel important, and his discrimination was not of a kind to discover when he had fallen on those whom he could only make uncomfortable. He now returned to Cerney.

“I trust I have convinced your lordship that we should do good work, and that we may fairly ask for your name as Vice-President.”

“You’re at work now, then?” Matcham broke in.

“Let me give you,” Mr Benson answered, pulling a handful of letters and odd papers from his pocket, “our preliminary circular. Only in proof as yet, till we get our full list of names.”

Matcham caught sight of “Licensing Bill 1908” at the top of the paper presented to him, and handed it back, saying he did not think he could be of much use to Mr Benson. The organising secretary, secure in having seen that Cerney and Matcham were friends, rattled on with his plans. He had come to speaking of offices when Matcham cut in again :

“I suppose you keep a regular office going, Mr Benson, and take in your leagues as they arise.”

“Oh, no. I——” He broke off, reflected a moment, then dived with a pencil into his note-book. “You must allow me to steal that notion, sir. It’s first-rate. I never thought of it, but it will do very well by-and-by. List of

leagues on a brass-plate at the door—no, in a frame of small movable plates would be better.” He came up again from his note-book, and went on: “Oh, no. There are always places you can get for offices—shops that hang in the market do very well. I’ve got scores of addresses here—” he tapped his book; “no one could have a better list, cheapest printers, too, and a list of clerks for temporary engagements—no, I don’t think you could do better than come to me.”

“But I might not want the same kind of league as you, Mr Benson. I might be politically opposed to your leagues.”

Mr Benson looked mildly puzzled. Then his face cleared. “Ah, you’re referring to politics. They don’t concern me. Sometimes against my leagues you might be, and sometimes for ’em.” Mr Benson elucidated further. “I expect you’re muddling up—if you’ll excuse me, sir—secretaries and organising secretaries. Secretaries are political, of course—gives people confidence, that. But organising secretaries—why, all they’ve got to do is to push what they’re told to, see the people they’re told to, and so on.”

“I see,” Matcham said, getting up. “We

may evidently expect to hear much of you, Mr Benson."

"When I get a real big thing——" The poor man almost sighed; and Cerney broke up the party. He promised to send an answer by post, and he and Matcham conveyed Mr Benson back through the passages.

Matcham in his seat in the House reflected that a good deal of what might be called "politics by simple assertion" was already inaugurated. The windows of public-houses simply reiterated one after another four or five statements, and never varied them. The method had been too little used by the temperance party, which had missed a great chance for simple assertion when certain eminent doctors had pronounced alcohol poison, without any qualification whatever. But, if all was to be dogmatic statement and counter-statement, what was the elector to go by? By the character of the men who made the statements? Democracy had hardly reached that standpoint, Matcham thought, as his eyes fell on a member of his party standing in the usual listening group by the door, a well-fed, sallow man, who pulled his extraordinary financial companies over apparently hopeless shallows,

juggled money till Cannon Street Hotel meeting-rooms were silenced, ran second-rate race-horses, glorified drink, and for some strange reason called the blending of all these things being a Liberal.

An elderly man with whiskers and a buttoned frock-coat edged along the bench to Matcham's side and murmured :

“ Well, what's going to happen ? ”

Matcham moved his shoulders uneasily. He knew the class of which this Sir Charles Jones was a specimen, and it bored him inexpressibly. It was composed of worthy dull men of business, whose nomination by local political associations was the last seal of civic importance. They had themselves no other reason for entering Parliament, and their one idea, when there, was that something should “ happen.” They haunted the Lobby restlessly, exchanging platitudes about “ the situation,” and were full of the proper party things to say about any given measure ; but they had nothing except such things with which to confront the most acute of arguments ; for this reason they seldom spoke outside their own towns.

Matcham replied : “ Oh, I don't know. What should be happening ? ”

“What are the Lords going to do, I mean? Will they really ally themselves for good with the brewers, and deliver themselves into our hands? I can’t believe they would do anything so fortunate for us.”

“Fortunate, you think? To kick out a Bill we’re spending all this time on, and a Bill we’ve promised?”

“My dear sir,” the elderly man turned, and tapped Matcham’s knee. “My dear sir, surely you see that that’s just what we want, for rousing the country.”

“H’m,” Matcham answered. “Do you feel so sure the country can be roused enough to make up for all we’re losing?”

“I fought my own election,” Sir Charles said impressively, “largely on that basis, so I tell you what I know.”

Matcham remembered that Sir Charles was faithfully returned to Parliament by an almost unvarying majority of two thousand, and wondered what his idea of a fight was. He replied:

“Well, I only know that my people now don’t seem very keen on anything I say about rejected measures.”

“Ah, you young men,” Sir Charles said

vaguely; "I'm afraid you don't know the power of good Liberal formulas. Stick to them, is my advice. Nothing does so well." He took his hat, and made for the Lobby, to have another shot at finding out what would happen.

A Liberal member, who had just been making a speech in which he had produced, with considerable effect, a trade circular, privately sent round to the managers of public-houses, was sitting down amid cheers. He listened for a few minutes to the next speech, and, finding it was not addressed to his points, slipped out into the Lobby. As he went through the group at the door the tail of a remark reached his ears—"can't think where he gets the things." He smiled when the next voice in his ear said :

"Confound you, Watson. I didn't think you could find so much in those papers."

Watson turned to reply to this man, a brewer. You would have taken him for a slightly scholarly country gentleman, of easy means and simple habits.

"Well, you shouldn't give me the chance, you know."

"Oh, I don't mind. Let the little victims

play. In fact, I'm glad for one reason—it may teach these stupid publicans to keep their hands out of the affair. They'll ruin it."

When Matcham came into the Lobby before dinner he saw Ingram strolling to and fro with Sir Charles. In pure sympathy he went up and said :

"Sorry to interrupt, but can you give me a minute, Jack?"

As they moved away he said: "Be grateful for your rescue."

Ingram laughed: "Yes; I saw it in your face. Anyway, I've news for you. The Richardsons are coming back next week."

"Oh," Matcham said, with his eyes on the Latin texts in the floor tiles. "And that's news for me, is it? Well, dear man, I shall be very glad if it is."

XXII

A FEW days later Ingram heard from Irene that she and her mother were breaking their journey in Paris, and coming on by Calais. She gave him the date of their crossing. At first sight he took this simply as information ; then a further thought struck him, and gave him pleasure. Her note might be an invitation. She was crossing on a Saturday ; why should he not take a week-end at Dover, and attend the travellers on their arrival. Mr Richardson might be going down, but that he could find out. Ingram rang him up on the telephone, and said he had thought of running down to Dover for a couple of days, and possibly meeting the travellers. Was Mr Richardson going ? Mr Richardson was not ; at least, he had not till then thought of it, soliloquised a moment into the telephone, decided to stay in town, and ended, in a tone which even the telephone conveyed as genial and understanding, by saying that he would very much like to feel that Ingram was there.

So Saturday found him in the wind on the Admiralty Pier, taking long turns up and down, watching the oncoming boat. When she slid inside the harbour, thrashing her screws once or twice along the pier wall, he was down under the penthouse roof. He had seen Irene and her mother in the rear of the crowd on deck long before they saw him. He gave his arm at last to Mrs Richardson, and said over his shoulder to Irene :

“The guard told me you hadn’t reserved places, so I got a carriage for you.”

Irene was glad of his presence, first for his having realised the vague idea she had had in writing and so readily embodying the kind of assurance that had been growing on them in letters. Moreover, she had had enough planning in the last few days to be well content to be put into a carriage and have tea and papers and strawberries brought to it, and telegrams despatched. All the same, she did not immediately settle down in her corner. She tucked up her mother with cushions, drank her tea, and finally stood at the door looking down at Ingram. Then she found that she could not look at him. She turned her eyes quickly away. He was very silent. At last, seeing a

change in the bustle on the platform, he shut the carriage door. Then she leaned out, and really looked at him again, and said :

“ You’ll come quite soon ? ”

“ On Monday——” His voice held up, as if another word were to follow, but he stopped there, and put up his hand to touch hers at the window. She smiled, but he was looking at her hand ; she turned slowly back to her seat.

He spent a remarkably happy Sunday, excellent company for himself on a long walk on the Downs. Yet, on a sudden desire to go back to town that night instead of waiting for the morning, he grew melancholy, and went to bed depressed. Travelling up the next morning he discovered with some anger that he was rather frightened, and finally decided that what he was afraid of was the first moment of meeting Irene. It was as if relations had got out of hand, and existed, so to speak, in the air, with no basis. However on arriving at the house he accepted quite calmly Helps’s intimation that Mrs Richardson would not be downstairs for a day or two. The drawing-room on his entrance was empty. Then Irene came in, so radiant and so welcoming that his cares fell away.

"Mother's all right," she said; "we're only taking care. And, oh, Jack, I'm so, so glad to be at home."

This made their handshake a gay little mutual congratulation, and he said:

"Well, I hope I look fairly happy, though I've stayed at home. Let me look at you. Have you grown, or got older, or anything? It seems such a long while, and I want to count you up and make sure you've come back."

"A little older, and a little wiser, sir. I've had a correspondent in the Government, who sent me long letters and much information."

"And nothing at all about one thing," he answered. He was feeling quite happy now, and smiling at her. "Dear Irene, we've got to get it over, you know." He came and took her hand again. "I'm very happy, but I'll be happier when you've said it."

She took one of his coat-buttons in her other hand, and looked steadily at it. She said softly:

"Then wouldn't you like to begin?"

But, before he had said anything, she turned her face up to him, with a little brimming of tears.

After a while she whispered : " I have grown so sure, my dear. Haven't you ? "

" Sure with the whole of me," he said. " I've had my heart so full of you, and it has wanted so to run over. I've been so gathered-up these months, so single-minded. I can't think of myself now without thinking of you."

" Nor can I. And I never want to any more. Jack," she held him again, " by the train there on Saturday—you remember?—when you said 'on Monday'—and you stopped? "

She looked up, and he gave a loving little laugh. " I nearly said—'dear.' "

She put her head against him, with a small comforted sigh, and heard his " Dear—dear—dear."

She spoke again. " And I loved you, my dear, for never saying it in letters. I think you did in a way say it. Your letters were so kind and so merry, and always seemed so close. And they were so *you*. That was better than things said ; and now—and now I've heard them, and it's sweeter, dearest."

" I had you too, dear heart. I always felt you so, when I was writing, and, when your letters came, you were always more vivid than I had felt, and more steadfast, and—just more

dear. I love your ways, my dear, and it's so happy now to think that you were always a joy to me, even long ago. I believe I've thought more about you than about anyone I've known."

"And taken longer to love me?"

"But it's all taken in, darling," he said, "because I know how I love you now."

"Say it," she whispered, "just all by itself."

So he said it by itself, and she said it after him, and they looked at one another long, and had no need to turn away, or say anything. Then at last she broke out happily:

"Please may I sit down? I think I'm quite tired," which made him a penitent man, and he had to go down on his knees by her chair, and then had a panic lest Helps should come in; and after a while they remembered that they had not decided to be married, so they began again, and decided that; and came at last to the conclusion that, if Ingram were coming back to dinner, the least he could do would be to go away first.

So he went, and they sent Helps to whistle for a taxi; otherwise Ingram might have fallen on his friendly neck.

When he came back to dinner he had hardly

been two minutes in the drawing-room before Mr Richardson came in. It was unusual for him to be dressed so early, and, as he shook hands, he said :

“Of course, I suppose we ought to leave it all till after dinner. That’s the proper time. But it will make dinner so much jollier, if I say now that I’m thoroughly glad. I think you’ll go far ; anyhow, I know you’ll work. And Irene and you should know one another by now. There will be plenty to talk of later, but I wanted to say that.”

“You’ve always had your own ways of being kind, sir,” Ingram answered, “and I think they’ve always made people happy. Thank you immensely.”

It was certainly a very jolly dinner. Helps conveyed in a hundred subtle ways that he was aware, and was glad. And Irene’s first words had been her mother’s love to Ingram and a message of happiness. She went upstairs after dinner, and left the two men to a long talk, which ended in Ingram’s coming into Mr Richardson’s business. His only hesitation now was that he might not have time enough to give to it ; but Mr Richardson, though he did not actually say so, rested in a fairly strong conviction that his prospective

son-in-law was too keen a man to have a thing under his hand which he did not know all about, however much that knowledge had to be squeezed in. At the end of it all, when Helps held his coat for him, Ingram came out with :

“ Helps, you’re an old humbug, but I suppose I shall have to tell you—you may congratulate me.”

“ Thank you, sir ; with all my heart, sir. Miss Irene is as nice a young lady as there is, and I’m glad it’s you, sir, out of all the young gentlemen that used to come.”

“ And I’m glad you’re still here, Helps, to know which of us it is. Good-night.”

Ingram looked in at the House, to catch Matcham, and give him the news. The result was that they sat up till one in the morning. Ingram did no more work in the House, and very little in his Department. The House, indeed, did not matter. It was evident that the Licensing Bill was going to take time ; and the Government had decided not to drive it, but to let the House rise at the usual date, and meet again in the autumn. So his superiors were not feeling severe, and Ingram had days with Irene on the river, and in Surrey pine woods ; and congratulations flowed in. It was

Mr Richardson who ultimately reminded the pair that they had better consider political dates in their plans. So Ingram consulted an Important Person, who looked gravely at the matter, and pronounced that postponement later than January might be unwise.

“Oh, well,” Irene said, “we can say we want a quiet country wedding. After all, dear, it wouldn’t matter to them if they didn’t need you, and that’s all to the good.”

Before the House rose, he was booked for more speeches in the early autumn; and in August he went off to join Mrs Richardson and Irene at Burlands.

XXIII

HE had had some quiet weeks there, when Mr Richardson came down with a few men to shoot partridges. Ingram professed never to have shot anything except a rabbit, which, in younger days, he had shamelessly "stalked" one evening. But he liked the excitement that partridges added to a long walk over reaped fields, so he went out with the party. He had in that way long talks with these men, two of them only a little older than he, one on the Stock Exchange, and one in Lloyd's, alike in a clipped brevity of speech on business affairs, and a free and cheerful talkativeness on golf and shooting. The third man, Champion, was older, and sat in Parliament on the Conservative side. Politics had not come up at all in the party till one day Champion, finding himself tramping beside Ingram, broke out:

"Well, what do your fellows think of things now?"

This started a polite meandering discussion,

in which neither side would come within rather distant fencing, until Ingram said :

“ I suppose all this alarmed shaking of heads over Liberal projects has always gone on, hasn't it ? I suppose we've always been dreadful people running the country into catastrophes.”

“ I suppose so. And yet—oh, well, there again, I suppose each generation imagines there's special reason for alarm. Certainly we do now.”

“ Yes ? What do you think is the particular reason now.”

Campion strode on for a time reflectively, and then said :

“ I'm afraid there's nothing to offer you but the old platitudes. We feel that we don't understand you, we seem to have no measure of you, and so, when you go far in legislation, we can't a bit tell how much you have taken into account. We don't know what you have considered, and put aside as reasonably overridden. We can't tell how far round you look.” He reflected again, and came out with : “ I had better give you all the platitudes. You seem to us to be too short with traditions.”

Ingram nodded, and said :

“ I think you're still sparing my feelings,

aren't you? It's really almost as much mistrust of us as individuals that you feel, isn't it?"

Campion admitted it. "There are some of you who say wild things, and we wonder who and what there is in your party to balance them."

"But you don't in actual debate find us very wild, do you?"

"No, that's true. But there again the ground is not steady. Every time we're in Committee men of yours come up with the whole thing clear in their minds, entirely well got-up, mastered. Well, that's excellent in one way. But they are so seldom the same men on two different Bills. You all seem more or less specialists, and one wonders if you are not actually blinder than the ordinary man about things in general, things out of your special beat."

"But why set us against the ordinary man so sharply? Surely everyone has his pet subject."

"Yes; but men have their traditions and one knows on other grounds, in other directions, what kind of men they are. What I mean is new even on your own side. Look

at Dilke. No one would call him a specialist, though, if you only heard him on one subject, you might think so."

"As for our new men," Ingram said, "you may take it from me that they're not all rampant intellectuals."

"Ah — intellectuals! They're a different breed, I think. No one would call John Morley a specialist."

Mr Campion returned to partridges, and Ingram went home by sandy lanes. The constant reference to traditions made him keep the conversation in mind, till he went to Castle Morton, on his way to make some speeches in the north.

Lord Morton made him very charming congratulations on his engagement. "Rose tells me," he added, "that Miss Richardson is delightful, and a very clever person. I shall look forward to seeing her."

"I don't think she would let anyone call her very clever, sir. She's a happy person, and has her own opinions even if one doesn't always hear them."

"An admirable quality," the old man nodded; "you've known her a long time, haven't you?"

“Ever since I was at Oxford. Her brother was a great friend of mine there.”

“Indeed! Almost antique faithfulness, Mr Ingram.”

The young man laughed. “Hardly that, I’m afraid. We’ve been good friends, but not at all on the basis of marrying.”

“Well, I’m glad for your sake that no one else came in. It strikes me that young men are so casual about these matters that one hasn’t much faith as a rule in their coming out right in the end. You evidently have. Miss Richardson is a great politician, I suppose?”

“Oh no. She’s interested, but at present I fancy she’s not at all convinced by my convictions.”

“Ah, Mr Ingram, I need not tell you that one roof can easily shelter different opinions. It’s not at all a bad thing to have a kind of domestic Champ de Mars, where you march your troops out to work them a bit. It keeps the streets of daily life free of minor disturbances; and one knows the limits of the manoeuvre grounds.”

Ingram was going to make more qualifications, when it occurred to him that he was presenting a singularly negative picture of his

prospects, and he was not at all sure that Lord Morton was not growing mildly puzzled. So he dropped the subject with a smile, and reminded the old gentleman of the conversation they had once had about the new young men in politics.

“Yes, yes. Most interesting it was. And have you found any solution for yourselves—or, rather, any solvent to weld you in? For I remember that was more our point.”

“No. I’m afraid I’ve only found more difficulties. The latest complaint I have heard about us is that we’re becoming a party of specialists, each with a subject.”

“Exaggerated, as I remember much of our conversation was. But I daresay specialism is inevitable just now. We’re all so fearfully sociological. You should try to draw the Bishop on the subject.”

The Bishop of Capelbury was staying at the castle. Ingram had met him on platforms, for he often spoke at meetings of social workers, though he kept away from strictly political meetings. His fine domed head held a brain that never tangled an argument; and the long straight line of his mouth, sharp in his clean-shaven face, looked as if he would

never abandon an argument. Yet the whole rather severe expression was softened by large, kind eyes, which would often have been sorrowful but for humorous wrinkles at their corners. Ardent as he was, he was not easy to draw out; Ingram, however, was fortunate before his visit came to an end. The two had been talking of some Liberal projects, and the younger man had designedly remarked that he hoped a certain thing would make the working man "content." The Bishop said:

"Content? Ah, work would be light, if one could hope for that. Contentment's a state of mind, and we all seem to be compelled to spend so much time on states of body."

"But we're always being told that we must go that way round, and that our people cannot think or understand, or even feel, till they are housed, and fed, and healthy."

"I know," the Bishop assented; "I think we've let that idea run away with us. It's curious, too. We trace all our modern political activities back to the Reform Bill; yet I believe that the great upheavals of that time owed their force, their sweeping force, not to material sufferings—infamous housing, atrociously low wages, and all the indifference of

the upper classes, which Disraeli depicted in 'Sybil' and 'Coningsby'—but to the spiritual revival, to Wesley and Whitefield, to the stirring of a need for righteousness. And from that the cry came for more righteousness between man and man. But there was so much wrong then between man and man that, in dealing with it, the whole movement turned slowly negative, and I wonder sometimes if any positive is left. We are always hunting for things amiss. Do we ever try to set up any positive righteousness? Righteousness is not all correction of wrongs, of injustices, of sufferings."

"But there are still so many," Ingram said, afraid lest the Bishop was going to stop.

"Of course there are," he went on, "and the more need for a spiritual force. I wish conditions could be dealt with by the way, so to speak. We're not in the jungle, in which there's only one path, that has to be cut open everlastingly by pioneers. I want to see the trade unions, for instance, doing much more than sentry-go along the frontiers of agreements with employers. I'm not greatly worried now about material advancement. So many men are looking after that on material grounds—

race efficiency, and international competition. But the spirit of man—I wish that wanted more now. It does want, in a vague way, but it doesn't seem to know that it wants a master." He paused a moment, and continued: "We preach our Master, but sometimes I think that there is too little sense of what mastership means at all, so little that our preaching has no idea to appeal to in people. The very word 'master' has become one of the wrongs. Bring it back, Mr Ingram. Make men understand obedience. Then you can give your orders about houses, food, health. But until then you are not giving orders; you are only launching possibilities. and hoping they will materialise."

"Are we, some of us, I wonder," Ingram asked, "rather too masterless ourselves?"

The Bishop looked at him: "As you have put it at its strongest, let me do the qualifying. You are not masterless in the sense of being unguided, undirected, whatever your directing lights may be. But it strikes me that there are many men in Parliament now who have not enough—how shall I put it?—one might almost say not enough incentive to life. They get their living just too easily; they haven't enough pressure of the chain. Did you ever

happen to come across some lines written by one of that fantastic young England band, Lord John Manners? You'll hear them laughed at now, and indeed they were ridiculous as an idea of going behind the industrial revolution, and setting up feudalism anew, with everyone touching his cap to the squire. Two of the lines were :

‘Then shall the lower orders once again
Feel the kind pressure of the social chain.’

And even the talking of ‘lower orders’ starts us on a superior smile nowadays. But the lines come back to my mind. Those orders haven’t lost the tug of the chain, but it hardly sits at all on a really clever young man of the upper middle class. Yes, I’m afraid in the end that you are rather masterless. A melancholy conclusion, Mr Ingram.”

XXIV

SOME instinct in Ingram impelled him about this time to make a sentimental journey. A good many years ago his old Rectory home had been broken up by the death of his father ; and he had never seen the place since. It held much of his youth, for it had been his home for twenty years, and in that time the territorial sense may grow strong even in a class in which it is the very price of ambition to surrender it. At anyrate the sense was so far genuinely surrendered in Ingram that revisiting the place appealed to him, not as a renewed contact with the soil, but merely for the interest of meeting, as he put it to himself, his own ghosts. Vaguely he felt that, meeting on familiar roads the schoolboy or the undergraduate who had borne his name, he might read in their eyes some comment on the Under-Secretary. But before he went his mood changed and softened. The recollection especially of those roads, the almost startling clearness with which every contour of them came to

mind, brought back companions upon them. With the companions came the thought of those easy old affections, the beautifully complete community of interests which unites a boy to boys, the beautifully complete absence of any community at all which gives so poignant a quality to childish love affairs. The dim figures moved again in the old settings. Friendly gates admitted him once more to green, quiet lawns, and the effortless beauties of old-fashioned gardens; to the high clear voices of summer tennis-parties, or to the dark windy avenues from which one passed to the warmth and lights of a winter's call that had been an excuse for a walk. He had loved walking, and after all walks did not end in calls, however warm and welcomed, but in the return home—the hall on a January afternoon in darkness, and the glimmer of a carefully slacked fire in the dining-room. Or in the longer autumn days, on return from a stretching twenty miles, the happy indifference of the household to anything but facts, and the discovery that one had been so pleasantly telling oneself heroic stories of the future that one had not noticed whether the workmen were still at Poundgate, or the family back at Heron's Shaw.

That one house he would like, he felt, to re-enter. But to other houses he had no wish to go back. The people in them, still mostly the people of the old days, would talk to the Ingram of the present, while his possession of them would be in the recognitions of the Ingram of the past. Consequently it was more of the roads that he thought, the sight of houses and cottages and of field-paths and woods. So that his mood turned wholly sentimental, and he alighted at the railway station in the little country town with a sense of days in hand more peculiarly than he had known them for some time. Nor did any expectation fail him. He found his way to the inn-yard full of tilted carriers' carts, and left his bag in one with the old secure absence of explanation. He was giving himself the walk of seven or eight miles which he had so often covered in the old days with a list of family commissions at the shops, ticked off item by item, and the parcels left just so in the carrier's cart. As he turned the last corner, and the grey old church tower of his home rose across the broad East Anglian fields, he could at last penetrate the secret of the strange contentment of mind which had surrounded all this enterprise, could

understand why he returned with such security to a place in which he had no part, and be glad to think of seeing again a rectory occupied now by strangers. The truth was that, whether for good or ill, his life in boyhood and youth had been so much enclosed in his own imagination that he could in isolation recover it. It made no difference that his parents were no longer there, because in the days when they were he had shared with them so little beyond appearances. Affection had not been wanting, but it had been of the kind, baffled on the elder side, compunctious on the younger, which had come to mean now an aching rather than a full heart for the backward look. He could employ hours, he knew, on these roads and in the home fields and the gardens, and return to sit alone at the village inn aware that his aloofness, if more obvious, was really no greater than that in which he had sat at the Rectory supper-table in his youth. He swung briskly down the road into the hollow and up the sharp little hill to the church and the long Rectory hedge, curiously careless of whether for his purpose his walk turned him into the old gate, or led him past it—past the cottages, every one of which he could have drawn from memory, up

to the inn, which was in fact where he ended, with the amused sudden thought that it was almost the only threshold in the place he had not crossed before.

Throughout the succeeding days nothing eluded him. He leaned over the cobbler's half-door, and encountered that worthy's theological posers as if the last time he had lingered there had been a week ago, instead of eleven years. He turned on a pitch-dark night into the blind lane that led to the chief farm, and reached the gate without a single hesitating step, although his eyes could do nothing to keep him from the three-foot ditches. At the Rectory he paid a call, and took lunch, perfectly assured that in some way he was yet to have a more intimate return to it. This seemed so unquestionable that he never weighed it up, and was started on quite a different purpose when, on Sunday morning, the inspiration came. He was in a lane skirting the glebe fields, and was crossing a tiny stream, hardly more than a ditch, between overhanging banks. Next moment he had swung himself, for about the five-hundredth time in his life, down under the wooden rail to a slippery foothold below. He sidled along a dozen crumbling yards,

reached up to a leaning willow trunk, hauled himself handily over the hollow bank, and was within the Rectory orchard. The second kitchen garden ran down one side of it; the asparagus beds waved a golden forest at him, and the potato rows were half up. He moved a few yards along the bank, searching for the gap in the hedge which should let one through to the further fields without going up to the orchard gate, which stood over the rise of the ground and in view of the house. The gap was still a gap, so all was well. He had used the old way the boys used when they had been officially turned out for a walk, or to pay a call, and preferred privately to attend to their own affairs in the fields or by the little lake. You set out dutifully tramping the road, and in three minutes you were happily in the orchard, ready to drop like a shot into the grass by the nut-trees if old John happened to be at the potatoes and to turn his head. Ingram ran an experienced eye over the nut-trees. They had always been old and unfruitful, but as usual there were a score or so of nuts, and he gathered a few. Then he crouched and slowly made his way up the slope of the orchard to the farther hedge. Through this he could peer

at the house. It had a Sunday stillness, and the cattle standing beyond the hedge had not heard him. Nevertheless the orchard gate was rather a prominent way out ; so he returned to the foot of the slope, and crawled through the gap with his cap down over his ears. Thence the ways were easy ; the muddy little lake lay to the right, concealed by trees ; and from their shelter one could make a detour round the next field, and emerge over the crest of the farther hill, safely out of range of the house, to the square wood and the best blackberry hedges in the parish.

One brother he left by the lake, plastering mud at his peril over the hole of a wasps' nest in the bank. The other he met by a blackberry bush, singing :

“ He’s ma Jonah, ma hoodoo ;
He wears a red coat and a yaller vest ;
Some time dat coon will be laid to rest
Wid a lead-pipe on a dark night.”

So they fell to picking blackberries together, after which they sat a while on a gate to crack nuts.

Ingram looked down across the autumnal meadows, no whit ill at ease with his ghosts. Life had worked out rather slowly for him in

externals, but he himself could find no deep interruptions or hesitation in it. Yet he had no doubt come to these haunts with a notion of turning over for good some pages of his life. How strange it was, he reflected, that one never in youth had the sense of doing a thing for the last time. It was years before one realised that certain companions, certain scenes, certain pursuits and pleasures had ceased to have any vitality. Until now Ingram's young days had remained with him in the unrationalised way in which he thought of a young brother, dead many years ago. He might not have the boy in his mind for a long time, yet whenever he thought of him it was with no sense of greater removal, of greater distance ; he could not come back, but he was never withdrawn. In the same way youth had seemed neither wholly past nor ever actually present. Was there then something in his circumstances now which was to make a new act in the play, to shift the scene for good ? There might be a time in which the future began to occupy the place that the past had held, neither of one's life nor outside it—the light on the point one was just leaving.

He had constantly the feeling that in men of

his kind it was no affectation to say that success had always been due more to good fortune than to any personal quality ; and the Bishop's words at Castle Morton had strengthened the feeling. It would be affectation to deny effort, or even merit ; but the exercise of any quality had been in a medium the very name of which was opportunity. He could see himself at every stage—success at school, his scholarship at Oxford, his first work in London, his first membership of Parliament—thanking his stars that he had pulled it off, and rather at a loss for any justification. Perhaps, he meditated, the extraordinary development of the middle-class had contributed among all its effects in modern England this also—the kind of sweetness and the amenable mind which came from just that habit of thanking one's stars. The hardness, the unworkable strata, so to speak, in modern life might possibly be traced to men who, rising from classes in which opportunity was less, and preoccupied with the rise, had the misfortune of something which they must inevitably call well-earned success. They had for so long passed others in their rise that they could conceive of no advantage over themselves which was not somehow unfair, and saw malice

in any check. At any rate, Ingram reflected, he and his kind had to be thankful that they at the outset had been spared the souring fight for opportunity. Beginning often as a fight to open a way for others, it was apt to turn bitter in the discovery of how much there was impeding oneself. A man might so easily then become heroic to himself, and even the honesty of his thought of others might grow tainted with "superiority." To be free of such circumstances, to have avenues so open that thousands marched them along with you, was to find life sweet at its source.

The sweetness and amenableness worked in many directions, and prevented men from detecting too obviously their chances in life. They did not come up to some conjunction of circumstances in their work with the consciousness that rightly handled it would mean measurable advancement. Other people might be saying at a given moment that you would make or mar your reputation ; but often you did not hear them saying it ; the time might pass without your knowing what had been in the balance. That also should make for the decent disciplined mind. True, he remembered with a smile, it was possible to think too little

of chances ; he recalled Lord Morton's remark that young men seemed to be very casual about their marriages. But that was a different matter, one in which class customs remained curiously marked in an age when class distinctions were becoming so blurred. Was it not, perhaps, an ineradicable middle-class mark not to arrange these things ? It would indeed be a perfectly right and just mark. For the class which did arrange them, however lightly and unspecifically, was in the main arranging for impersonal things—preservation, stability, continuity. The indecent and uncomfortable practice would be to arrange for novelty, for change, for a leaving behind. In this at least it was sweeter just to thank one's stars.

His face softened, as the conclusion came to him that this was in the end a journey of love, as well as of sentiment. The warmth of his heart was for fields and roads by which he had travelled to Irene ; and this boyhood had made something which she found dear. The rather commonplace thought grew, as he looked across to the roof of the Rectory. The boy who lived there had always had both too much and too little conceit of himself. He had always just pulled things off, but generally by the narrow

shaves of a mind so quick that his perpetual idleness just failed to have it by the heels. Schoolmasters and tutors—possibly even now election agents—made no concealment of their knowledge of the narrowness of his shaves; rubbing in his perils had almost amounted to a theory of the way to bring him up. But now Irene was somehow turning the faculty to such a new angle that “squeaking through” lost its reproaches, and all the unhealthiness went out of counting upon it.

Voices reaching him across the field warned him that the people were coming out of church. He dropped contentedly off the gate, crossed the fields, and came out over a stile into a group of farmers and their wives. They stopped to shake hands and talk. He felt half lugubriously that this was the genuine meeting of his past, as he stood facing the eyes of these slow-talking men. They were eyes that conveyed a tolerant amusement in no need of expressing itself. He was still “Mr Jack,” but anything that he had done since his boyhood remained unreal to these men. Young men, they knew, did certain things at college which were said to be successes; they did them, as far as farmers could see, by some inexplicable process un-

associated with work. No doubt they went on doing things: but in an order of creation so remote from crops and beasts and long working days that one reserved one's opinion; one looked with those amused eyes, and was polite. Ingram made his way back to the inn glad that his own reflective flight had not been higher. His tumble was less shocking than it might have been.

XXV

WHEN the House met again in the late autumn, it was with set teeth. There was no doubt now that the Licensing Bill was to be opposed with all the force the trade could arouse. To extreme Liberals this meant that the Lords would "do the trade's bidding," and reject the Bill. To the world at large it meant that the trade had mustered sufficient opinion against the Bill to waft the Tories over any difficulty they might have felt in flatly ending a measure which had occupied so large a place in Liberal electioneering. As with the Education Bill, so now with this; the opposition was vocal enough to weigh down the balance. There had been ups and downs in the Liberal hopes. For some time the public-houses were silent; and even when they began to sound again they did not develop any general attack. Then, at last, came the demonstration in Hyde Park: and, though it was neither more nor less than other such demonstrations—a mingling of

people with interests at stake, people easily led by catchwords about "fair play," and the drifting London crowd that is sucked up by any swirl of the current—though the demonstration was no more and no less than usual, it was taken to be final as the trade's profession of irreconcilable opposition.

So the House of Commons met again rather grimly, determined that the Lords should at any rate have a Bill to which work had not been grudged. They worked, indeed, so steadily and so successfully that they even made themselves wonder whether, after all, the Bill could be killed. At the eleventh hour hope sprang up again, and the tone of the Tory newspapers sounded far from secure. Was there perhaps a real wavering, men asked. Was there some genuine uneasiness as to the effect on the country, if the Bill were set aside?

The answer to these questions, when it came, took so remarkable a form that they were justified. On the day before the second reading of the Bill in the House of Lords a conclave of peers sat at Lansdowne House, and decided that the second reading should be defeated. This was an extraordinary proceeding, which even strongly Tory newspapers castigated.

Nothing could have suggested more clearly that the Tory leaders were moved by considerations which they were ashamed to produce in the House itself; and they had no ground of complaint when their methods were interpreted as hypocritical. And it was foolish in the extreme for men who were trying to represent to the country their value as a revising chamber to allow this colour of secrecy to appear in their action. Obviously there had been, as hopeful Liberals thought, real uneasiness. But the conclave of peers made up its mind, the Bill was rejected; and Liberals saw one more of their chief objects, at the time when they had taken office, put out of their reach. Even while they were engaged on the Bill they had foreseen the working of a second string to their bow; and now announced frankly that, if there was to be no term to the monopoly value of licences, then there were ways of securing to the State a larger share of the monopoly profits. The Lords had rejected the Licensing Bill. Then the next Finance Bill should contain a sharp stiffening of licence duties and brewing and spirit duties. If licences were worth so much as the compensation claimed for them would imply,

then the State was not getting its adequate share. To which the only answer, in those days of the early mutterings of a new storm, was that, if duties were raised, retailing prices would be raised to meet them ; the consumer would pay, and Liberals might see how he liked it.

The Commons were going angrily through a day or two of winding-up. Instead of the languid, half-filled House usual at such times there was a buzzing attendance of irritated men, longing for battle. Their leaders made a few carefully suitable statements, and left the Lobby to seethe.

Ingram was amid the seething one evening, when a messenger came to him with a request that he would go to the Prime Minister's room. He went down the library passage, the hum and movement of the Lobby following him, and turned to the left into another long corridor, empty save for one man rooting among the papers in his locker, and raising at his feet a little drift of torn fragments. Farther on, a solitary policeman stood at the corner of another corridor, which was silent and deserted. It led to a succession of short turning passages, giving here and there on a staircase. The one

or two policemen on duty seemed to be immured; not a sound broke the stillness. The noise of the Lobby was gone like a dream; it was difficult to remember that close at hand was the familiar House itself, with the Speaker in his canopied chair, the scattered men on benches, the voice of someone addressing the House. Nothing was here but the hanging lights and closed doors, one after another. Ingram presently knocked, and went into a large comfortable room, in which two men sat at spacious writing-tables with shaded lights making bright islands of the papers under them. He said, "Good-evening," and the man at the nearest table, lifting a fine but rather saddened face, said:

"Good-evening, Ingram. The chief's expecting you. I'll tell him."

Twenty minutes later, when Ingram passed out again, he was too much excited to do more than pause for a moment. In five minutes he was in a cab on his way to the Richardsons', to catch Irene for half-an-hour before dinner. She saw his excitement, as he came in; he knew the Government plans for the coming year, the challenge that was to be thrown down in the Finance Bill, and the alternatives

that the Tories would have to face. He had for her the news that his own part in the coming year was to be considerable, and, if well played, was to lead him into the Cabinet.

He stayed to dinner; and afterwards Mr Richardson said :

“You’re going ahead then, Jack. I’m glad to think you can do it now with a happy mind.”

“I wish, though, I were going to have more time for work with you. It will be hard to fit that in, but I must try.”

“Oh, time enough for that. Office won’t last for ever for you.” Mr Richardson paused for some time, and presently went on :

“To tell you the truth, I’m not sure that we ought ever to look for you much in our work. I don’t want you to miss bigger things, and there’s the chance that you might.” He spoke now slowly and reflectively. “You know, people are talking of you, Jack. You’re beginning to stand to some extent for a younger force in politics. It’s not what is most prominent at the moment as the new force; it’s something behind that, something hardly as yet in view. What is mostly being taken for

the new force, I suppose, is what George and Churchill stand for. But, when you look at that, it's chiefly, after all, a bringing into line of a force clear for a long time—labour. They are making labour men consciously integral in the machine. George does it by having labour and the life of labour always in his eye when he is speaking, and by basing all he does on giving it consideration. There are no longer, one might say, to be classes, but only a sort of alphabetical order. Churchill does it by all the methods the Board of Trade gives him, labour conferences, boards of arbitration, and so on. I doubt if you'll ever see him take anything but the most domestic offices now. But people are beginning to think there may be something in Liberalism fresher than these two; something at present, if you like, far too academic, too amateur, too much in the air; but something more disinterested and unbiassed, something more capable of appreciating what exists, as well as having ideals of what ought to exist. That may bring fresh grist into the machine, may bring in men like me, who vote nearly as massively as the most Trade-Unionised labour man. We're not too much bound up in anything; we can see, for instance, as many flaws

in the House of Lords as you. But we want a little lack of logic in the men we trust ; and if it takes the form merely of taste, of pleasure in the way things are done or have grown, I daresay that would serve. This is a long way of getting at my point, but I had to go round that way. Men, as I say, are talking of you ; you are human. I'm always meeting men, of very different opinions, who like you. Why shouldn't you be the new generation in politics ? Why shouldn't you make it the core of your party, and lead it before very long ? ”

Ingram did not reply at once. There was so much that might be said, and he had to search for a starting point. Finally he chose one :

“ I'm not sure you haven't yourself given a reason against your own suggestion, sir. Taste, and freedom from too much logic, and a gift of appreciation may be very useful as salt in a mixture, but can they make a compound of themselves ? I must say I don't quite see us—my friends and my set—developing as a party. ”

“ Well, I haven't come to my idea by way of politics at all. You know I've never thought

I knew much about them. But I've had to think a little about Charlie from time to time, and I've seen how queerly links are made nowadays for the people who use them, or who like to try to. The old sharp divisions are gone."

"Yet so many men have told me that they don't understand us, or see where we are going."

"Perhaps because they don't yet see you at all," Mr Richardson said. "It's George and Churchill they see, and you men somewhere in the bunch. Perhaps you don't yet see yourselves. Look here, do you remember once talking to me about Balfour's curious failure at first in the new House, and how he got back his place, and his tone?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, why do you think he got it back?"

Ingram nodded: "I see. I suppose the secret of what happened was some salt in our mixture."

"Yes. And I'll tell you something else. George and Churchill were bound to take the line of those who thought Balfour's tone useless. See what I mean? Now you fellows can

understand — understand much. It's your chance."

"Well," Ingram said at the end, "if I don't exactly see your party, I can believe in its shadow before."

XXVI

INGRAM had spent Christmas with his mother, and was passing through town afterwards on the way to his quiet wedding at Burlands. He was to stay the night with Matcham, Lady Rose being at Castle Morton with a young Matcham whom she was not yet able to leave. He reached the house in Kensington Square to find that his host could not arrive till just upon dinner-time; but his hour alone was not heavy on his hands. He had much to think over, and this house, with its bridal atmosphere still fresh about the life of his friend, was amiably in tune with his thoughts. He recalled a certain little house at Knightsbridge, which seemed to wear this air so constantly renewed that he had come to think of it as a house that existed to be taken by newly married people. Every year or two it showed to the street a fresh creamy front, with gay little curtains of some tender colour in windows which blossomed with white and blue and gold flowers. It was charming to

think of a house, small and shy in its rather fine place, lighting up constantly with the pulsation of newly joined lives, and kept innocent and gay because it was too small for anything but the first happy perching. The Matchams' house was just so small and youthful, and was like a bright assurance of the promise of his thoughts, the vitality and fragrance of his relation with Irene.

Because the promise was so deep, he could let himself play freely with other threads in his mind, which lent themselves more to analysis in the passing of an idle hour, and were no less directly suggested by his surroundings. His life and Matcham's might appear on the surface to be taking such different personal turns. The natural thought would be that one must go deep in reflection to discover how it was that Matcham and Lady Rose had no difference of social outlook, and such an agreement of intellectual outlook, of taste, and even of instinct, that differences of birth seemed indeed to be in such a relation accidental. Ingram suspected that they were not. Only this moment he had said to himself they made a distinct difference between his marriage and Matcham's. Yet the more he

thought of it, the more sure he was that the true difference was in a sense impersonal, unindividual. Considerations of character and taste would only bring out similarities. Compared with Lady Rose, Irene had only known the raw first-fruits of wealth; yet, had there been much, or any, real difference in the results of their upbringings? Irene would no more than Lady Rose have sacrificed life's finer issues and flavours to material comforts; of that he was certain. But the question of just where and how she and Lady Rose, separately and unitedly, fitted into the social readjustments, the processes of which he found so absorbing, was not answered in the common cry that there were no differences now. Individual tastes might be alike; but birth must count for the mellowness of one's spiritual and intellectual inheritance. To Ingram himself, to Irene, and to Matcham their inheritance was recent; and when political ideals and actions were in question might they not find it difficult to hold it at its value? Their taste, in every point as pliable and delicate as that of Lady Rose and her like, was nevertheless much more conscious; it was, in fact, an acquired possession. Perhaps

even to speak of their recent inheritance was but a piece of comforting phrasing ; had they genuinely inherited any environment ? The generation which had opened up avenues was hardly past, and its work hardly yet handed on. Probably it was only those for whom the inheritance had become customary, the inheritance of graciousness, of order, of taste, who could be sure of not overvaluing it, of having it, even to the point of unconsciousness, in its right place. It was not that the qualities themselves in the new-comers were less genuine, but the mere fact that they were more a conscious possession made them quite different ; and in the difference surely lay a danger. He had seen in some of his contemporaries, seen at its height in well-bred Americans, a power of deciding, in details of personalities and art and manners, " This example is, and this is not, the right thing." The presence of this power had always made for his discomfort. Socially he had thought it defeated its end ; to recognise too quickly the objectionable and its nature placed you, not higher, but more conclusively in the middle ; for from the real height distinctions were less minutely observed. He would perhaps have

felt more diffidence in saying the same of arts, of letters, of the taste that was responsible for what was gathered about one in one's home. Yet here too he was sure that you had to be new yourself to be ultra-sensitive.

He was getting down, he felt, to his differences. Might not such ultra-sensitiveness mean in the end that those of whom he was specially thinking—Irene, Matcham and himself, for example—would cling to, would be less able than Lady Rose to surrender, certain delicacies and graces, which, if Liberalism was a reality, would have to be temporarily surrendered in days that were ahead? He could see the stumblings already beginning, could see, for instance, a squeamishness at work in men whose only social defences were the lines of their own taste. He almost brought his meditations round to the point of thinking that the wonder was not that people of distinguished birth were often good Liberals, but that any of the more newly and specifically educated class were Liberals. There had always been in the high-born Liberals whom he knew a kind of serenity of Radicalism, which at moments astounded him. He began now to discover the roots of it. Such men no

more blinked what was objectionable, exaggerated, overdone in their allies than his own sensitive kind. But they were no more teased by it than by a Sidney Cooper next to a Hobbema in the family home. Men passed, and contributed their bad and their good ; but life and the nation went on, and the sifting would take care of itself, so only the purpose of good did not fail or halt. A Ripon, a Spencer might come but rarely ; yet only in some such accustomed stability as theirs, in some such security—to be left, if the need should come, below and behind one—could there be hope for those whose life and ways and instincts were generation by generation refining themselves.

When at last Matcham arrived neither politics nor life made the easy rambling talk over dinner. The two friends wandered so far back into the past that it was midnight before they came up at all to the future.

“Rather clever of you, really,” Matcham had said, “to be getting married just at this moment. Saves you from worrying, like the rest of us, over the session’s work lost, and the big throw-back altogether.”

Ingram mused : “ I don’t think it’s all throw-

back. I believe we've done far more than we can see in our moment of disappointment. Put it on the lowest level, and we've surely made the trade recognise that the battle isn't over. They can't settle down comfortably; they know that we shall come back to the business. And when we do, there will be more acquiescence than we shall see at first. The trade never surrenders; but it sometimes comes half-way, when one's not looking."

"Yes, that's true. A fight now on licence duties will keep them so worried that they'll want some years of peace."

"Besides," Ingram continued, pursuing his own thought, "there's a better way to look at it. The whole business of temperance reform will never be discussed again on the old levels. We've screwed it up several pegs, and no one, teetotaller or more general reformer, will ever have to begin at the beginning again."

"Oh yes; the work of bringing the country up to a subject isn't wasted, I know. People at least understand what we're talking about when we start again. But what's maddening is that so often we do all the talking, all the educating; and in the end the Tories come along, when we've made an idea vital, hatch

up something on the same lines, and take all the credit."

Ingram sat a while in silence. He got up, and stood looking at the fire, knocking out his pipe, before he said :

"I wonder if we ought to complain of that, Harry. Isn't it truer to measure Liberalism not only by what it puts on the Statute Book, but also by a great deal of what the other side puts there? One looks back, and sees the marks of Liberal Ministries not so much in where they left off as in where the other side began again. What if we exist mainly to raise, so to speak, the tide-level? Tories embark in their turn, and find that they can't go back to the old levels without drowning themselves; so like sensible men they go on where they are. Our finger is in their pie, as theirs never could be in ours."

"That sounds serene enough to be a gospel," Matcham smiled.

"Well, at least we're old enough to know that there's nothing so unassuming as seriousness."

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